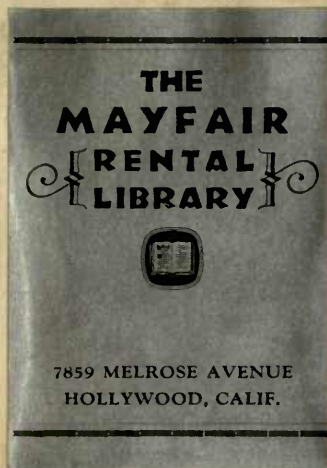


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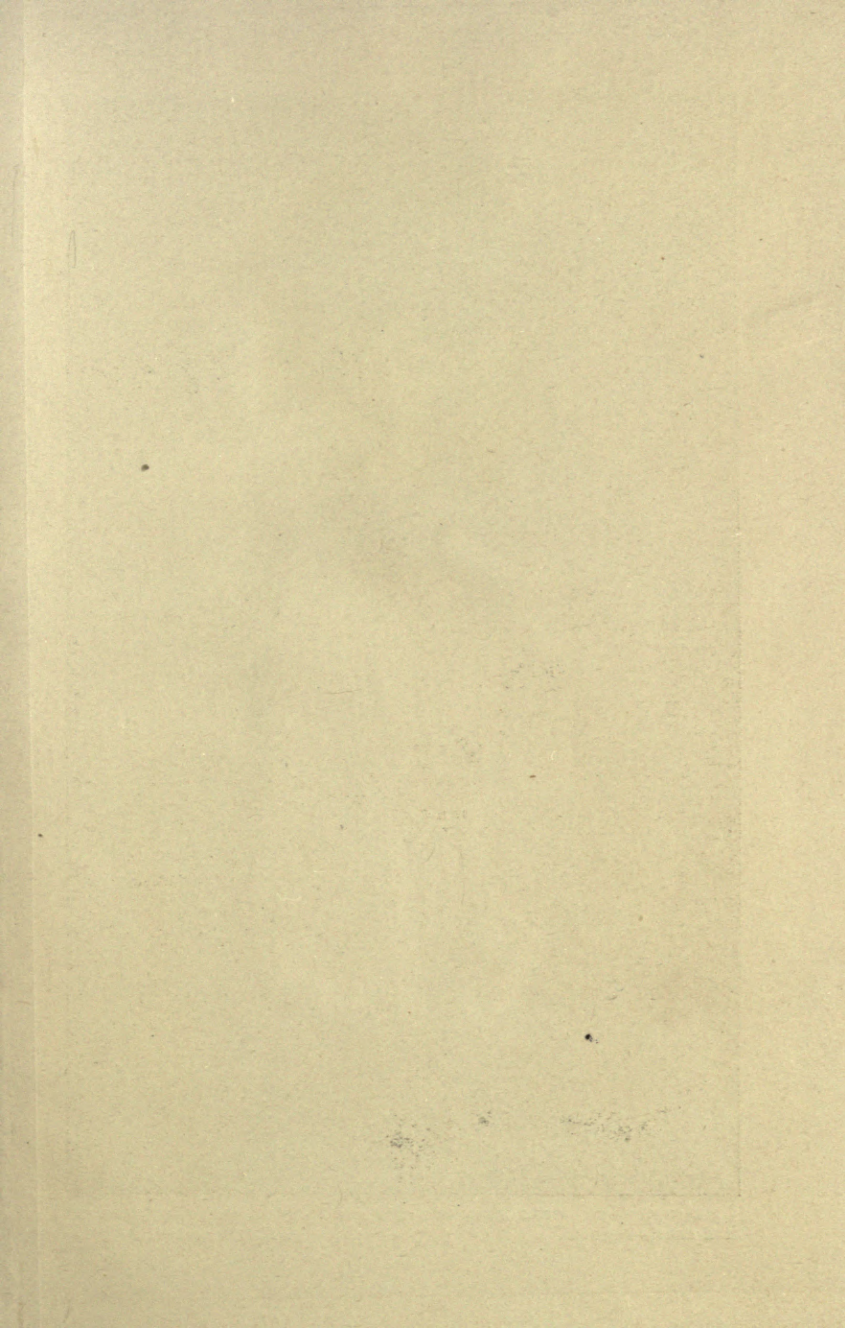
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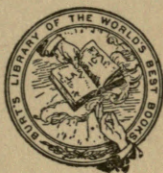
AND SNATCHING OFF HER BETROTHAL RING, SHE FLUNG IT INTO THE WATER AT
HER FEET.—Page 130.

In the Counselor's House.

IN THE ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ COUNSELOR'S HOUSE

By E. MARLITT

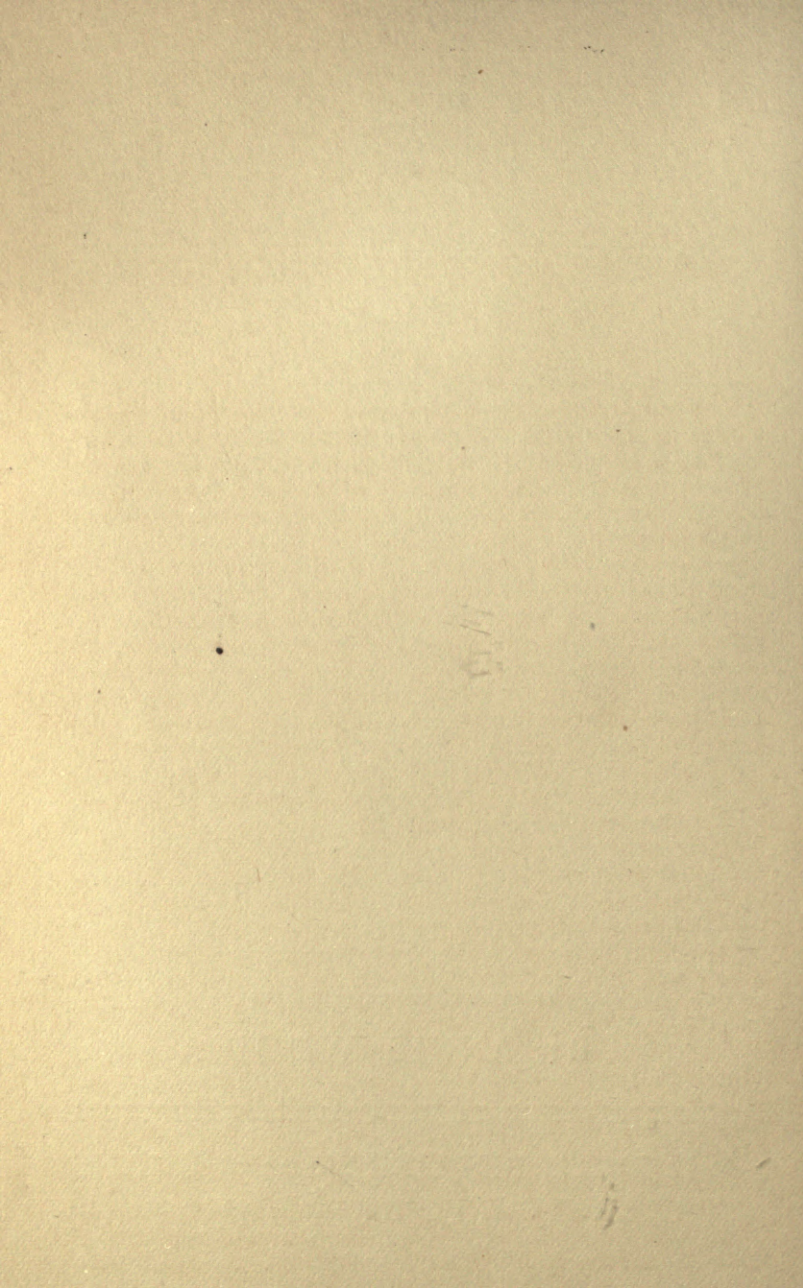
Author of "OLD MA'M'SELLE'S SECRET," "GOLD
ELSIE," "IN THE SCHILLINGSCOURT," etc., etc.



TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

By ANNIE WOOD

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IN THE COUNSELOR'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE slanting rays of the December sun played dimly across a large bedroom in the Mill-house, glittered for a moment with dazzling brightness on a case of surgical instruments which lay exposed to view in the embrasure of the deep stone window-sill, and then vanished through the thick, overhanging snow-clouds in the sky.

In a corner of the room, away from the glare of the light, stood a massive wooden bedstead, ornamented at the head and foot with paintings of common yellow roses and bright pinks, with a large feather-bed heaped high upon it, on which lay the master of the house, the miller. He had just gone through an operation for a tumor in the throat, which had many times threatened to suffocate him; it had been a difficult and very dangerous proceeding, but the clever young man who had just lowered the blinds, and was arranging his instruments in their case at the window-sill, had a satisfied expression on his face, for the operation had been successful.

While under the influence of chloroform, the patient had raved and tried to resist the hand of the doctor, as if he were fully conscious of the pain inflicted upon him; but now he lay pale and exhausted upon the pillows, and very still. To speak he was forbidden; yet a glance at the laconic, silent-looking face, whose only beauty was the soft shining silver hair which hung about it, would have convinced a looker-on that the doctor's command was very unnecessary.

"Are you hopeful, Bruck?" asked a gentleman, in a low tone, as he drew near the young doctor. Up to this moment he had been standing at the foot of the bed, and his handsome face still bore marks of the emotion the sight of the operation had produced on one unaccustomed to such scenes.

The young doctor nodded.

"Everything is well as yet, and my patient's strong constitution will aid and complete my work, I am convinced of that," he answered, calmly, as he turned his eyes with a satis-

fied air toward the bed in the corner; "and now I must leave off watching here; I am obliged to go. My patient must on no account move, he must be kept very quiet—everything depends on his being still, for fear of bleeding, and—"

"You may depend upon me," interrupted the other, quickly; "I shall remain here as long as the old man is in danger, or it is necessary for him to be watched;" adding, "Will you tell them in the villa that I shall not return to tea?"

The color deepened on the young doctor's cheeks, and his tone had a somewhat sad ring in it, as he replied:

"I can't go that roundabout way through the park, for I must reach town as soon as possible."

"But you have not seen Flora to-day, and—"

"Don't you think I know that? or that it costs me nothing to give her up?" and he drew his lips together, and hesitated, as he put his case of instruments in his pocket. "I have many sick patients to attend to to-day," he added, after a moment, more quietly; "Lenery's little girl is dying—will die in all probability to-night; I can't do anything for the child, but the parents, who are worn out with nursing and anxiety, count the moments until my visit, I know; the poor mother won't even eat unless I make her."

He moved to the side of the bed, the invalid raised the lids of his eyes, and looked at the doctor for a moment with an expression of warm gratitude shining over his sunken features for the unspeakable relief the absence of the tumor gave him, and feebly tried to stretch out his hand; but the doctor held it quiet on the coverlid, as he repeated his injunctions that he must lie completely still, and try and not move at all, adding:

"The counselor intends staying with you, Herr Sommer, and will see that my orders are faithfully carried out."

The old man seemed content, turned his eyes languidly toward the counselor, as if seeking in his face for a confirmation of the doctor's words, and receiving a friendly assuring nod in return, closed his eyes, as if he wished to sleep.

The doctor turned away from the bed, took up his hat, shook hands with the counselor, and left the chamber.

Had an anxious loving wife been sitting by that bedside, she must have felt, as the door closed behind the young man, a feeling of loneliness and desolation creep over her, contrasting strongly with the hope and confidence which imbued the poor woman in the town whose child was dying, when an hour later the doctor entered her room and persuaded her to eat the meal the suffering of her little one had caused her to forget.

But by the miller's bedside no loving hand or tender wom-

an's anxiety had a place. The old housekeeper came in quietly enough after the operation was over, and noiselessly began clearing away the disorder consequent upon the doctor's visit; but she seemed more distressed at the sight of a few drops of water spilled on the table-cloth than by the danger and suffering of her old master.

"Do let all that alone now, missus," said the counselor, in a low but very polite tone. "The movement of those things will disturb father, and the doctor ordered, before all things, the most perfect quiet."

The woman did as she was bid at once, taking with her the basin and towels and the unfortunate wet table-cloth to be dried in the kitchen.

Now all was as silent and noiseless as it is possible for a mill-house to be. From under the floor came the faint constant recurring burr and trembling of the mills, the very monotony of which was almost soothing in its effect—outside, the continual flapping of the water against the mill-wheel, the cooing of the doves, and the rustling of the twigs as the huge branches of the chestnut-trees swayed to and fro in the evening breeze, could not and did not disturb the invalid on the bed, for to him they were as natural as the air he breathed, or the regular beatings of his own heart.

What a hard unloving face it was on which that elegant man standing by the bedside was now gazing. Perhaps never before in the whole course of his life had the excessive plainness of his face, the hard, coarse features, the thick under lip, looked so distinctly repulsive as just now when the sleep of exhaustion from physical and mental suffering deepened the furrows in the miller's countenance, and sharpened the stamp of his character more clearly about the mouth. Well, the old man's life had been a rough one, at all events for a great many years. He had started on his career as a sort of miller's errand-boy, but now he was a man who had made his way in the world, and been able to coin for himself gold and position, which perhaps accounted for the counselor's respectful mode of speaking and calling him "father," for there was certainly no tie of relationship between them. The late banker Mangold, whose eldest daughter had married the counselor, had taken for a second wife the miller's only child; and this link of marriage was the only connection between the suffering old man lying on the huge painted bedstead and his faithful watcher.

The counselor moved away from the bedside and went over to one of the windows. He was a young, energetic-looking

man, but the silence and anxious watching in the sick-room made him feel nervous—it seemed to pain him to look at nothing but that hard, unsympathizing countenance on the pillows, and the knotted, clinched hand lying nerveless on the bed-clothes, which had formerly cracked the whip over the heads of the mill horses with so much force and will. He gazed out of window and for a few moments idly watched the landscape stretched before him. The December sun had withdrawn its feeble rays, and a gray, soft light, fast fading into the darkness of the coming night, seemed to cover the whole earth.

Just beyond the spot where it turned the mill-wheel, the river made a sudden bend, and here, half hidden from view by the branches of the trees, stood a square building, ugly in form and appearance, the hard outlines of which gloomed strangely in contrast to the graceful curves of the swaying trees in the fast-approaching darkness.

It was the spinning-mill belonging to the young man standing by the window. He, too, was rich, employing several hundred workmen in his manufactory, and it was this property of his which had brought him into close business relations with the miller. The mill itself had been built about a hundred years before, and had certain privileges attached to it which were in force at the present day, besides controlling so much of the river that those who lived in the neighborhood were inclined to grumble at its excess on this point; and not one of these rights would the miller cede so much as by one inch. At first only a tenant, he had, bit by bit, as his riches increased, succeeded in becoming not only owner of the mill and its water-rights, but of the whole surrounding land to which it belonged. He had bought the last few acres shortly before the marriage of his only child to Herr Mangold the banker. The miller regarded the possession of all this property from a purely monetary point of view; for himself he did not care to own the land, and thereby increase his importance in the social scale, but that his daughter might reign over it as mistress he did care, and for this reason he had refused to sell the handsome villa inclosed in a noble park, which formed one portion of it.

Lately the merchant had become his tenant, and, at the time our story begins, occupied the villa with his family, and by yielding at first to the old man's weakness about the disputed water-rights, he had gradually fallen into the position of an obedient son to his somewhat surly and ill-tempered landlord.

The factory clock had just struck four, and the gas was already lighted in the offices. The air was damp and heavy, as often happens before a coming fall of snow, and the gather-

ing darkness intensified the brightness of the light shining from the windows of the far-distant spinning-mill, as well as those which were nearer at hand. The pigeons, after huddling close together for awhile under the shelter of the tall trees, suddenly flew away from off the branches, and hurried to roost in the warm dry cover of the dove-cote. The merchant felt chilly standing at the window, and turned toward the interior of the room. As his eyes glanced over the apartment it struck him what a very pleasant, homely looking place it was with its well-worn carpet, discolored prints on the walls, and wide, old-fashioned sofa inviting one to lounge in comfortable ease on its soft pillows. The old servant brought in some fresh logs of wood, and replenished the dying fire in the open stove, just as the last glimmer of daylight was fading through the shining glass of the communicating door of the adjoining small room. Behind this door stood the iron safe in which the miller kept his money and papers of value.

About an hour before the operation was to be performed the sick man had made his will; and as the young doctor and the merchant entered the house, they had met the lawyers and witnesses to the signature on the door-step about to depart. However cool and collected the outer mien of the miller had been, he must inwardly have felt strangely nervous and upset, for in putting away the documents he had just signed, his hand shook visibly, and one of the papers remained behind on the table. He did not notice this unwonted proof of oversight on his own part till after the doctor and his friend had entered the room, and then, as he saw it lying on the table, he begged the merchant to lock it up in the safe in the adjoining cabinet. On the other side of this small room there was an outer door which led into the large entrance-hall, where numbers of the people belonging to the mill hung about on business.

The merchant stood warming his half-frozen fingers by the stove, when his eye wandered carelessly toward the inner little room. He started, and for a moment wondered if he were dreaming, for he saw that the door of the iron safe stood open. Ah! if the miller had noticed it, what a state of anxiety he would be in about his beloved gold! "No one can have entered the room," the merchant said to himself as he walked into the little sanctum, "for I should have heard the slightest footfall; besides, the opening of the outer door could not have passed unnoticed by me," and added, as a kind of comfort to his own anxiety; "however, I must see if everything is all right."

So saying, he drew back the safe-door as gently as possible,

and passed in. It appeared all right, the heavy money-bags of the formerly poor errand-boy stood by the side of the piles of paper arranged in order, and many shining gold pieces were there also. The merchant's dazzled gaze wandered in search of the paper he had hastily pushed into one of the pigeon-holes at the miller's request; it was a valuable document, being the inventory of the whole property. He was laying it carefully on the top of a packet of similar documents, when he accidentally knocked over one of the small piles of gold pieces, which rolled down on to the uncarpeted floor with a clanging, clanking sound that made him shudder. He had unwittingly touched gold belonging to another, and the blood flew into his face with an undefined sense of shame and vexation at his awkwardness as he stooped to pick up the scattered pieces. He had barely reached one, when a large, heavy body fell on him from behind, and strong bony fingers grasped his throat.

"Damn you, I am not dead yet!" hissed the miller in his ear, in a strangely choked voice, as he tried to drag him out of the cabinet.

A tussle ensued, in which the young man had to call up all his strength and elasticity of movement to shake himself free from the murderous clutch of the old man on his throat. To seize the miller with both hands and violently wrench his fingers from their hold on his neck was the work of a moment; but it required one or two more before he could recover breath enough to gasp:

"Are you mad, Pater? How could you insult me with—" but he broke off as the sick man tottered against the wall, and the white bands round his throat and chin became suddenly scarlet in hue, and red drops of blood trickled fast down the front of his night-shirt.

The merchant shuddered, and his face paled to an ashen-gray as he saw this dangerous sign. This, then, was the bleeding that the doctor had said must by all means be avoided.

"Am I in fault?" he asked himself rapidly; "am I to blame?"

"No, no," he cried aloud in answer to this unexpressed thought as he sprung forward, and gently putting his arms round the miller's form, would have carried him back to his bed; but the obstinate old man repulsed him, and pointing silently to the fallen Louis d'or, intimated his intention of remaining where he was till they were all safe in their place. To the danger he ran of losing his life by this proceeding he either paid no heed or forgot it in his anxiety over his money; and it was not till the merchant had picked up each piece, laid it on the shelf, and, locking the safe, placed the key in his

hand, that the miller with feeble, tottering steps, allowed himself to be led back to his room, and sunk exhausted and faint on his bed. The moment the merchant had placed the invalid's head on the pillows, he called as loud as he could for the old housekeeper and the servants. When they came in, the miller's eyes were fixed in a glassy, frightened gaze on the broad purple mark the flowing blood had already made on the linen sheets and pillow-case.

A messenger was dispatched with all haste to the town to fetch back Dr. Bruck, while the housekeeper brought water and fresh linen to try and stop the bleeding. It was all in vain. The merchant pressed towel after towel on the wounded place, but the blood could not be suppressed. There was no doubt about it, one of the arteries must have given way. And how did that happen? Had the half-delirious old man done it himself, or—and the merchant's heart gave a great start—had he done it when he was endeavoring to free himself from the grasp of his angry assailant? “How was it possible for me to tell in such a moment of agony, when he was holding my throat in a vise, whether I seized his shoulder, or neck, or arm, to shake off his hold on me?” he thought, as he watched the extreme pallor of the dying man's face. “Perhaps the sudden spring out of bed did it—Bruck told him everything depended on his lying still and not moving. No, no, my conscience is clear on this point; it was not my fault, and I can not, need not, blame myself. It is his own doing entirely. I went to the safe merely to see if all was right; how could he dare mistrust me, and suspect me of any such base design as he seems to have harbored concerning me?” And the feelings of anxiety and fright about the invalid in which the merchant had hitherto indulged, now changed to one of anger at the insult he had received. This was all he had got in return for his kindness—a kindness he would have offered to any one who was weak and helpless, it is true, for his nature was such that he could never refuse to forget himself for another's good and well-being. But if he had returned home, enjoyed the game of whist in his elegant drawing-room which he had looked forward to all day, this unfortunate circumstance would not have happened. Instead of being here now trying to stanch the fast-flowing life-blood, he might have been taking a comfortable smoke! It must have been his evil genius which prompted him to take up this position of watcher by the old man's bedside; and this was the awkward predicament in which it had placed him; and as these thoughts occupied his head, his hands grew more and more wet with the stream

that still continued to ooze from the lately operated-on throat. How slowly the moments went by! The invalid seemed fully aware of his danger, and although he could not speak, his eyes wandered anxiously toward the door each time a footfall was heard outside, as if he hoped for a reprieve from approaching death by the appearance of the doctor, while the merchant watched with painful anxiety the changes in the sick man's face, which betokened, even to an inexperienced eye, that his last hour was at hand.

The housekeeper brought in the lamp, then hastened out of the room again to listen for the doctor's voice; but she heard nothing, and returning to the bedside she too stood watching in silence the pale, exhausted face, rendered almost ghastly by the flickering light of the lamp. A few minutes later the miller's eyes closed, and the key he had held firmly in his hand slipped from his grasp and fell on the sheet, for he had fainted from loss of blood. Unconsciously the merchant stretched out his fingers to move the key away, but the moment he touched the cold steel, a shudder ran through his whole frame as the thought struck him, how would the world regard the late unfortunate encounter in the inner cabinet? He knew that it would be whispered all over town the next morning that the operation had been successful, but that the shock of seeing the merchant at his strong chest had brought on the bleeding, from which the miller did not recover; and that in itself would be a slur on his honor, for how was he to defend himself and prove the innocence of an action that would look so black in the eyes of others?—the very thought that even only one slanderous tongue might remark: "Why should Herr Romer go to the strong safe of the miller at all?" made his blood boil. He had enemies he knew who would be very glad to believe him capable of such a mean act. He smiled bitterly to himself as he remembered that his hitherto unblemished character and high repute for unswerving honor would not be sufficient to exonerate him from the foul suspicion which would follow the knowledge of his presence in the private sanctum at that critical time. The perspiration rolled from his forehead with the intensity of his anguish as he stooped over the dying man, and looked earnestly at him. If the miller did not recover strength enough to relate the affair before his death, then the event would be buried with him. "For," thought the merchant to himself, with a changed expression as he pressed his lips together, "I will never mention it to a human being."

Presently the watch-dog barked suddenly, and hasty steps traversed the yard and mounted the staircase. For a moment

Dr. Bruck stood motionless on the threshold of the door, as if turned into stone, then silently laying his hat on the table, he advanced to the bedside of the dying man. What a painful silence reigned in the room in spite of this fresh arrival!

"He will come to again, won't he, Herr Doctor?" asked the housekeeper, in an awed whisper.

"Hardly," replied the doctor, looking up from a grave examination of the waxen face on the pillows, his own cheeks white as the linen on the bed. "Control yourself," he added, sternly, as Susanne seemed inclined to break into a flood of weeping, "and tell me why my patient left his bed?" he added, as he pointed to the drops of blood on the floor.

"That must come from these soaked towels," the merchant explained in a quiet, firm voice, though his face was pale to the lips.

"Why, of course he has not stirred from his bed, doctor; how could he, poor man? and you told him yourself not to move," replied Susanne.

Dr. Bruck shook his head.

"The bleeding must have been caused by some movement—he must have made some violent effort to—"

"Not that I am aware of, I assure you," replied the merchant, meeting the inquiring, earnest look of the doctor's eyes with a tolerably steady gaze. "Besides, what do you mean by staring at me like that? Do you think I would conceal it from you if your patient had sprung out of bed in some delirious fancy?"

He was determined to hold fast to the vow he had just made of keeping his own counsel respecting the episode in the inner room. To guard his own honor he would tell the boldest falsehood, though his throat felt as if grasped in a vise as he uttered the last words.

The young doctor turned silently away. Once for a moment the dying miller raised his eyelids and gazed vacantly before him, and made a slight effort to speak, but the sound from his lips was only a faint murmur that had no meaning.

A few hours later, Herr Romer the merchant left the Mill-house, for all was over—the miller was dead. Broad strips of paper were stretched over the bedroom and adjoining cabinet; for as soon as the miller had breathed his last, the merchant had taken care to have everything sealed up in safety before his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

SLOWLY he walked through the park toward home. The gleam of the lights from the Mill-house windows vanished behind him as he went forth into the darkness, alone with his thoughts. The wind swept around him sharp and piercing, cold snow-flakes rested on his cheeks, but it was neither the wind nor the snow which caused him to shiver as if with cold, but rather the bitterness of his own reflections, and the remembrance of the last few hours' excitement. Early in the afternoon, as a happy, careless man, he had passed over the same path he was now treading, and a few hours later he seemed as if he was burdened with the consciousness of being the innocent cause of a fellow-creature's death; he who would not willingly have harmed or hurt the lowest animal on the earth. He knew that the only reproach he deserved was that of silence, but by being silent he injured no one—not one individual would suffer, and—bah! he would reflect about the affair no longer—he was weary of it. Before him streamed the bright lights of the windows and doors of the lower story of his home; he was nearing the villa, walking up the broad avenue of linden-trees which led to the house, and he knew that, once inside that pleasant shelter, life had nothing but brightness to offer him. He breathed a sigh of relief as he reached the door, and turned his gloomy thoughts away from the mill and its late occupant, as he shook the loose snow from his dripping overcoat. In the drawing-room of the handsome villa, the widow of the late President Urach had gathered around her this same evening a large party of friends.

He paused a moment on the veranda, and peered through the brilliantly illumined windows at the rooms inside. Magnificent mirrors, costly velvet hangings, dazzling candelabras, rich furniture, and priceless pictures on the walls met his gaze on every side, and made the darkness of the night outside more intense in contrast to the warmth and comfort within. A gust of wind came sweeping up the avenue and dashed against the window, but, strong as it was, it could not shake the firm, secure sashes of the windows, or even cause the light gossamer lace of the curtains to tremble as they hung.

With a kind of half-wondering astonishment the merchant watched the company assembled in these rooms. He was not thinking of the dark or golden hair of the women, of maiden's soft eyes and blushing cheek, or of the head-dresses of the

dowagers and chaperones, but of the names many of those present had borne for generations. Officers of high rank, members of the court, ministers, and heads of noble families were sitting at the whist-tables or lounging in comfortable easy-chairs by the warmth of the stove. Even the noble old Dr. von Bar, the president of the medical council, was there, playing a rubber of whist with the wife of a duke, the head of one of the oldest ducal houses of the land. And all these people were in *his* house, in the house of the honorable merchant prince, Counselor Romer; the sparkling wine in the glasses came from his cellar; the luscious red strawberries, handed round by the liveried servants on crystal dishes, had been bought with his money. And the grand old lady who did the honors of his house with a queenly grace and dignity becoming her silver hair, was the grandmother of his late wife, for Herr Romer the merchant prince was a widower.

He turned to the west side of the house, where only two windows reflected the light from within on the outer darkness, from one of which the hanging red curtains cast a rosy glow over the marble nymph at the fountain near by. The merchant entered the hall, and giving his coat and hat to one of the footmen loitering about, he opened the door of the room with the red curtains. The entire apartment was furnished with the same shade of color as the curtains; walls, chairs, sofas, table-cloth, carpet, were all of a red hue. Beneath the lamp, in the center of the room, stood a rare Japanese table of ebony and gold inlaid with arabesque designs—a writing-table in the fullest sense of the term. On it were scattered books, paper, writing materials, and a thick manuscript, on the right side of which, on a small silver salver, stood an elegant spiral glass half filled with a dark rich wine. No flowers ornamented the room, nor did any bird-cage hang near the window. Life-sized busts in black marble stood on pedestals of the same material in the four corners, each one more severe and hard in mien than the other, and one entire side of the apartment was occupied by a book-case, harmonizing in color and material with the Japanese table, on the shelves of which beautifully bound books and folios of costly leather gave ample proof of the literary tastes of the owner of this room.

When the merchant opened the door, a lady who was pacing the floor with impatient but monotonous regularity stood still. At a first glance fancy suggested that she must have just come in from under the falling snow, she looked so white and pale in the midst of that rosy surrounding. The graceful folds of her long cashmere dress lightly fastened round her slender

waist, might be the result of a desire for ease and comfort, or the studied arrangement of the finished mistress of the art of dressing; whichever it was, the form it enveloped had a noble bearing and a dove-like charm that would have suited Iphigenia. Although not in the bloom of early youth, the lady was very beautiful, with a soft, clear profile, mobile features, and supple, rounded figure. Her very fair hair was cut short and curled in close waves round her ears and throat. She was Flora Mangold, and twin-sister to the merchant's late wife. On the appearance of her brother-in-law she started, folded her arms on her bosom, and looked anxiously in his face.

"Why are you not in there, Flora?" he asked, pointing in the direction of the drawing-room with his thumb.

"How could you expect me to be there? I am not likely to join grandmamma's tea-table, and knit stockings and bands for old women and children," she answered, angrily.

"But the gentlemen, Flora—"

"Why, they love scandal and tea as well as women, in spite of their orders and epaulets."

Herr Romer smiled.

"You have the blues, my dear girl," he said, as he flung his tall form on one of the easy-chairs.

But she shook her head and threw it back with a proud gesture, clasping her hands tightly on her bosom as, after a momentary hesitation, she said, breathlessly:

"Moriz, tell me the truth, did the miller die under Doctor Bruck's operating-knife?"

He started.

"What an idea! You women are always for making things blacker—"

"Make an exception of me here," she interrupted, with again that proud movement of her head.

"Certainly, of course; but with all respect due to your brains and general good sense, are you more lenient than the others?" he asked, as he rose and began pacing the room. This unexpected position of affairs was not to his liking. "Die under Bruck's operating-knife!" he repeated in a choked voice. "I tell you that the operation took place about two o'clock, and the man died a couple of hours after. Besides, I can't understand how *you* can bring yourself to express such a hard thought, Flora, let alone saying it in that hard, unsympathizing manner."

"I am just the one to say it," she replied, stamping her foot on the soft thick carpet. "I who can't bear secretiveness of any kind, you know that. I am too proud, and too

impatient and outspoken to know of another's faults and conceal them, be that other who he may! But don't imagine I don't suffer, for I do. It's as if a knife had been driven through my heart. You say I am unsympathizing. In my opinion, to sympathize with ignorance and want of knowledge in a man's profession is simply absurd and impossible. And you know quite as well as I do, Moriz, that Doctor Bruck's reputation as a clever physician has considerably suffered through his failing to cure Countess Wallendorf."

"But the good woman would not give up her fondness for savory pasties and champagne."

"That's what the doctor says. Her relatives are pleased to differ with him." Then pressing her hands to her brow as if her head ached, she added: "Do you know, Moriz, that when the sad news reached us here that the miller was dead, I rushed out into the open air to breathe, I felt so overcome? All the neighborhood knew the old man, and every one was interested in the success of the operation. And if, as you say, he did not sink at the moment under Doctor Bruck's operating-knife, people will justly remark that with his strong constitution he might have lived on much longer if it had not been done. You can't deny that you had the same conviction. You should see how white you are from inward emotion."

The door opened, and the mistress of the house appeared on the threshold. In spite of her seventy years she was a wonderfully young-looking grandmamma still. Nothing about her betokened her age, she did not even wear the full, loose cape that ladies of advanced age generally adopt, but her shoulders were covered with a lace fichu folded across her bosom, and fastened at the waist, and over a silver-gray silk dress, which was beautifully made, a black Spanish lace polonaise fell in rich folds to match the fichu. Her hair, which was so little gray that its golden color was still visible, was dressed in puffs above her forehead, and her head was ornamented with a soft tulle veil, the ends of which were fastened under her chin to hide her throat and ears.

She was not alone. With her came a rather undersized and excessively thin girl. She was not exactly out of proportion, but the painful absence of roundness in her form suggested there was something amiss in her figure, and that she was far younger than her fully developed face of four-and-twenty betokened. The three women bore a strong family likeness to each other, so marked in each feature that a mere casual observer would have guessed the relationship at a first glance—only the youngest had a broader and more determined chin,

and her profile was sharper and more defined. Her complexion, moreover, was unhealthy, and her lips had scarcely a tinge of color. Her fair hair was ornamented with bright-colored velvet, and her evening-dress was elegant and costly; but at her side, where ladies usually carry some dainty device for holding their handkerchief, this young maiden had placed a small willow basket, softly lined with blue satin, in which sat a little canary-bird.

"Henriette, I won't have it," cried Flora, angrily, as the songster left its nest and flew straight as an arrow over her head. "I will not allow it, indeed—you ought to leave your menagerie outside."

"But, Flora, my pet Hans has neither elephant's feet nor horns growing on his head, he won't hurt you," replied the little lady patiently. "Come here, Hans, come," she added coaxingly to the bird, which had perched on an ornament on the ceiling, and in answer to her call flew back and settled on her outstretched forefinger.

Flora shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't understand you, grandmamma," she said, sharply. "How can you tolerate such foolish childishness in Henriette. The next thing she will do will be to bring all the doves and rooks into the drawing-room."

"Ah, yes—and why not, Flora?" the girl answered, laughingly, showing her small white teeth. "Our friends have to tolerate you very often with a pen behind your ear and no end of learned—"

"Henriette!" exclaimed the old lady, in a reproving tone.

Every movement of hers was queenly in grace and dignity, and as she laid her hand on the merchant's arm and said: "We have just heard that at last you have returned home, Moriz," there was a very winsome charm about her manner that was not to be easily resisted. "Shall we have to wait for your presence among us much longer?" she asked in her still musical, soft voice.

Ten minutes ago the merchant had decided on getting into his dress-coat as quickly as possible and joining his guests; but now he said, hesitatingly, and in an under-tone:

"Dearest grandmamma, you must kindly excuse me for to-night. The affair at the mill—"

"Yes, that is sad enough, very sad. But I don't see why *we* need grieve over it. I really can not understand how it is possible for me to excuse your non-appearance among our guests."

"Surely our friends can not be so obtuse as not to be able

to understand that Kathe's grandfather is dead," remarked Henriette over her shoulder, as she carelessly turned the pages of a book in her hand.

"I wish, Henriette, that you would keep your impertinent observations to yourself," replied her grandmamma. "You really ought not to have such very bright ribbons in your hair. Kathe is your step-sister, but neither Moriz nor I consider the connection with the miller close enough to be acknowledged publicly, however much we may grieve over his death. And besides," she added, firmly, "the less said about this affair the better, for Doctor Bruck's sake."

"Good heavens, how unjust you all are to the doctor!" exclaimed the counselor, hotly. "He is not to blame in this matter at all; he did all in his power; brought all his surgical skill—"

"On *that* point, dear Moriz, you should hear the opinion of my old friend, Doctor von Bar," interrupted the old lady, tapping him lightly on the shoulder and nodding significantly toward Flora who had walked over to the writing-table.

"Oh, you need not mind me, grandmamma! Do you think I am so blind and deaf as not to see and hear which side Bar takes?" cried the beautiful girl, bitterly, while her lips trembled nervously. "Besides, Doctor Bruck has condemned himself, inasmuch as he has not ventured to come into my presence this evening."

Henriette had been standing up to this moment with her back toward the others. Now she turned suddenly round and faced them, her usually pale cheeks glowing scarlet for one moment, but whiter than ever the next, as she fixed her large flaming eyes on her sister's with a strangely mixed expression of shy terror and hate burning in them.

"Well! he will be able to refute your suspicions, for he will be here presently, Flora," observed the counselor, greatly relieved. "He will explain to you how terribly busy he has been all day. You know that he has several patients dangerous ill in town, besides that poor little girl Lenery, who is dying now."

The young lady uttered a mocking, bitter laugh.

"Dying, you say? Really, Moriz? Doctor von Bar told me only to-day that he saw the child yesterday, and thought the accident a very slight one; he feared, however, that Bruck's course of treatment was hardly wise; and you know Doctor von Bar is an authority."

"An authority full of bitter jealousy," said Henriette, slowly, with her vibrating voice. Then going suddenly close

to her brother-in-law, and laying her thin hand on his arm, she added: "Give up trying to convince Flora. You see how determined she is to prove her lover in fault."

"I? You unkind girl! I would give half my fortune if I could feel now the proud confidence in Doctor Bruck's skill I did when first we were engaged," cried Flora, passionately. "But since Countess Wallendorf's death, I have borne in silence the terrible agony of doubt and suspicion—now I need doubt no longer—I am convinced. I am not one of those women who love blindly and never ask themselves if the beloved one is worth sacrificing one's self for. I am ambitious, very ambitious, that you all know, and without this quality I should just be like the rest of my sex. God forbid! How any clever, aspiring woman can be content to go through life by the side of an obscure and unknown husband is a mystery to me, I can not understand it; if I had it to bear I should blush each time I looked my fellow-beings in the face."

"Oh, no; you think you would be so bashful? Ah! ha! It would require more courage than standing before an assembly of forward students, and reading a paper on metaphysics or some such subject," remarked Henriette in a mocking tone.

Flora gave her sister a scornful glance as she replied:

"Such a little viper as you one must not mind. What do you know of the ideal?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders. "But you are right in thinking that I would rather find my place at the lecturing desk of a college than by the side of a man who made a failure of his profession—such a mortification I could not endure."

"That is your own affair entirely, child," said her grandmother, wearily, as the merchant moved uneasily up and down the room. "You must please to remember that no one either urged or obliged you to engage yourself to this man."

"I know that, grandmamma. I know, too, that you would far rather have seen me married to the bankrupt lord chamberlain Von Stellan; and I think you also know that I will never allow myself to be influenced by any human being regarding what I think right for me to do."

"And no one will try, my dear," answered her grandmother with marked coldness. "There is only one thing I wish you to remember, and that is that I shall not spare you if you decide on making this affair public. You know me well, and that I will bear anything rather than be exposed to a family scandal or a slur on our name. I live among you all, and I am at the head of this house, and for this very reason I

will not have people whispering and talking about us, so I hope and trust, my dear, you will not fail in your respect to me."

The merchant suddenly ceased his restless march up and down the room and stood still by the window, drawing aside the curtain to look out into the night. The wind had risen considerably, and was swaying the young trees around the lawn till they were nearly snapped asunder, and the snow-flakes rushing through the air, dyed blood-color from the red glimmer of the lamp shining on them, harmonized well with the racking thoughts tearing through his aching head. At first he had been strongly tempted to tell Flora the whole truth about the affair, but now he knew that he dared not utter a syllable, simply because the noble old lady would leave his house directly his confession was made, rather than be subjected to the whispering and comments of the neighborhood which would inevitably follow; for he was obliged to acknowledge to himself that the beautiful ambitious girl would tell the whole story rather than allow it to be imagined *she* could care for a man whose professional skill was open to doubt.

Meanwhile Henriette drew forward, her slight, misshapen figure as erect as possible, her eyes flashing with scorn and passion as she said, looking straight at her grandmother:

"So it's only to avoid people's tongues that you are anxious my sister should come blameless out of this affair? It will be well for her if she does. You will forgive her if she masks her faithlessness with a worldly motive; you have no need to be so afraid of discovery, grandmamma. One has only to live in the world as we do to know that society has so many faults; it is like rare and curious old china, the more it is cracked and cemented the more valuable it becomes."

"You had better go to your room for the rest of the evening, Henriette," replied her grandmother, in a grave, warning voice. "I will not allow you to return to the drawing-room while you are in this bitter and impertinent temper."

"Very well, grandmamma! Come, Hans, we will go with pleasure," she answered, laughing and rubbing her cheek against the bird's downy plumage; "you too dislike the old ladies belonging to the court, and the great medical authority Doctor von Bar, I know you hate him and peck his fingers whenever he offers you sugar, you dear, brave little darling! Good-night, grandmamma; good-night, Moriz!" adding, as she suddenly paused ere reaching the door: "It is to be hoped that Flora will bethink her to follow the path that dear papa, had he been alive, would have sternly insisted on. With all her present boast of doing as *she* likes, she would not have

dared to utter such a sentiment in his life-time. *He* would never have encouraged her to break her word to an honorable man."

Sadly shaking her head she left the room, but had hardly passed the threshold when the hot tears, which she had scarcely been able to keep back while she spoke, rolled quickly down her cheeks.

"What a blessing she has gone!" said Flora. "It really requires all one's forbearance not to lose patience with her."

"I never forget that she is an invalid," remarked the elder lady, dryly.

"And to a certain extent she is right in what she says, Flora," the merchant ventured to observe.

"You may think as you please, Moriz," replied the young lady, coldly. "All I beg of you is not to meddle with me, and thus make matters harder for me to bear. As I said before, I don't wish for any advice; I mean to act as I think best in this affair. You and grandmamma may be quite at ease about me; I punish myself in being hard—but I have one silent ally, and that is—time."

She lifted the spiral glass off the table and raised it to her lips, drinking part of the rich wine it contained, while her grandmother without a word more slowly left the room.

"Apropos, Moriz," said the elder lady, appearing in the room again, "what becomes of Kathe?"

"We must wait for the reading of the will, to know exactly," replied her son-in-law, in a more cheerful tone than he had yet spoken. "I have no idea how the miller has arranged matters. Kathe is his sole heiress by law, but if he has made her so in his will remains to be seen. He always resented her being alive at all, because her mother died at her birth. In any case, she will have to come here for a little while."

"There you are mistaken, the girl won't come; she is as fond of her old governess now as she was in papa's time," said Flora. "You should only read her letters."

"Well, perhaps it is better that she remain where she is," observed the elder lady pleasantly. "To be honest, I am not so anxious to have her under my care. I never could take to her, not because of your father's second wife, Flora—that I have never allowed—but she was always wandering about the mill, and getting her hair and clothes covered with flour, and was ever a willful little creature."

"Yes, a perverse little rebel belonging to the people, and yet—papa's darling," said Flora, with a sarcastic smile.

"Very likely, my dear, because she was the youngest,"

remarked her grandmother, who never would allow that any one belonging to her family was neglected. "He petted you all in turn. Do you mean to come, Moriz?"

"Yes," he said, hastily, as he left the room with the elderly lady.

As soon as she was alone, Flora rang the bell, and when the lady's-maid appeared in answer to the summons, said: "I think I will go at once to my bedroom and work there! Just carry this inkstand and paper with you, and lay them on the table; I will see no one else this evening."

The red reflection on the snow vanished, but the white lights from the drawing-room streamed out into the avenue till long after midnight. When the merchant appeared among his guests he was greeted with such warmth and delight by every one present, and so much regret was expressed at his unavoidable absence in the early part of the evening, that his oppressed heart grew light, and as he looked first at one and then at the other, and met eyes beaming with confidence and regard, he began to feel at ease with his conscience and to let the scruples of the last few hours fade into oblivion. He sat at the whist-table and played with his usual skill, but he did not yet venture to comfort himself with the assurance that his silence had done no harm. By holding his tongue he had separated two people who had promised to become one over the betrothal-ring. But bah! Flora was such an odd girl. Bruck would be sure to gain distinction yet, and then perhaps Flora would change her mind again. He lifted a glass of costly wine to his lips, and therewith his last scruple vanished.

CHAPTER III.

As was expected, the miller had left all his property and fortune to his orphan grandchild, Kathe Mangold, appointing Counselor Romer, who had been for some years the girl's guardian, as his sole executor. The counselor could hardly suppress a start of surprise when the will was read, at the extreme confidence the old man placed in him, by giving him almost unlimited power over his ward's fortune. He could scarcely believe it possible, when he remembered that, an hour after signing this testament, the miller had accused him of trying to rob his coffers, and by his own rash suspicion turned the doubt which had necessitated the making a will into a certainty. The will declared that, in the event of the operation on his throat proving fatal, he wished all the landed property he possessed to be sold, with the exception of the flour-mill and

house attached. The reason for this exception was in the fact that it was the mill which had made his fortune, and even if his grandchild was as "proud and haughty as her step-sister," she need not be ashamed of owning such a place when the time arrived for her to marry. The estate was to be divided into various portions, and sold to different buyers. Forest, fields, and even the meadow-land and orchard were each to be purchased by a different person. As regarded the villa and park, the merchant was to have the refusal of that portion of the property—if he felt so inclined, reserving it as his own possession, with the additional sum of five thousand thalers, free of tax. This five thousand thalers was bequeathed to the merchant, not so much as compensation for the trouble he might have with the management of the vast property, but as a mark of the testator's gratitude for his kindly friendliness, and for being more like a relative to the lonely old man than the "other inmates of the villa." The proceeds of the sale of the estate were to be invested out in such manner as Kathe's guardian thought best, since the testator would lay no restrictions on a man whose incorruptible honor he had never known to be at fault.

Kathe Mangold had not seen her home for six years. When her father was dying he extracted a promise from her future guardian, that she should go and live with the governess who had brought her up, and taken the place of the mother the child had lost at her birth. This lady was about to marry and settle in Dresden, and Kathe's papa, the banker Mangold, knew that his little pet daughter would be much happier if he left her under the care of her old governess, than if she remained at home with her grown-up step-sisters. So little Kathe went to live in Dresden, and as the years passed on she was never invited to pay a visit to her old grandfather at the mill, who could never forget that the birth of this child caused the death of his only daughter, the only human thing he had ever loved. Now the old man was dead, the time had arrived for Kathe to return to her home. In answer to her guardian's letter announcing the contents of the will, the girl's only request had been that the large corner room in the Mill-house with the small cabinet adjoining might be left exactly as it had been in her grandfather's life-time, which request had of course been attended to.

It was the middle of March, and the snow was not all melted away, when a young lady left the narrow streets of the town, and turned up the broad road leading to the castle mill. The melting snow had made the roads very dirty, the wheels of the carts heavily laden with flour-bags had left deep

rats all along the route, but the pretty feet shod in well-made boots did not seem to take much heed about the dirty state of the footpaths. Holding up her black silk dress as far as her slight well-rounded ankle, so as to avoid sprinkling it with mud, the girl trotted briskly along, the color deepening in her cheeks from the unwonted quickness of her movements. A loose black velvet jacket lined with fur could not hide the graceful outline and full development of her bust and figure, and a small hat of marten fur slightly drawn off the forehead, showed off to perfection the glossy shimmer of her light brown hair. The face was by no means classical in beauty, the nose was too short, the mouth too large, the dimpled chin a thought too firmly set, the eyebrows not sufficiently arched to form a perfectly beautiful face; but the delicate oval of the cheeks, the rich full lips, the white lids of the sparkling eyes fringed with dark lashes, the fresh glow of the complexion, the sweet innocence of her expression, fully atoned for any want in regular outline of feature, and made Kathe Mangold's bright young face a very attractive object to gaze upon.

The young lady entered the court-yard of the castle mill, and looked around her.

The sun was shining brightly on the grand old walls of the Mill-house, making the massive stones of which they were built appear grayer and older than they were in reality. The last portion of snow had slipped from the roof during the night, leaving the gray slates clean and dazzling in the noon-day sun; the resin oozing from the buds was glittering like diamonds on the moving branches of the chestnut-trees, and a number of pigeons were cooing somewhere near. Just in front of her, on the doorstep of the workmen's eating-room, sat a man covered with white flour, devouring huge mouthfuls of bread and cheese.

At the stranger's approach the dogs in the court-yard set up a loud barking, but not a whit frightened, the young lady called out in a coaxing tone:

"Be quiet, Mohr! Watcher!" At the sound of her voice the animals only barked the louder, and tried hard to break away from their chains.

"What do you want?" asked the man, slowly, and with difficulty rising from the doorstep.

The girl smiled gayly as she replied:

"I want nothing but to say how do you do, Franz. Where's your wife?"

"Surely it can't be our young lady?" said the man, flinging down his knife and bread, as a broad smile lighted up his face,

and he gazed into the new-comer's countenance with an expression of astonishment blended with unfeigned delight that made the laughing girl blush with pleasure.

In the years gone by, when Kathe was a little girl, she had been called by the hands at the mill the "mill mouse," from her love of creeping about the granaries and work-rooms whenever the foreman of the works would allow her to follow him in the discharge of his duties.

"Very curious," remarked the man half to himself, who was no taller than the girl before him. "It's very curious; the dimples in the cheeks and the eyes are the same, but how tall she is! And now she's mistress here," he added, as he glanced somewhat shyly at the slight girlish figure before him. "She takes after her grandmother. Be quiet there, you beasts!" he thundered, holding up his fist at the dogs, who were barking as if they were mad with joy. "The creatures remember you, I do believe, my honored young lady—"

"Better than you do, Franz, the dear fellows!" she answered, interrupting him, and going toward the animals she began caressing them with her hand. "But why do you address me as 'honored,' Franz? I have not become noble in Dresden, I can assure you."

"But the ladies at the villa like to be addressed in that manner," he remarked in answer, looking inquiringly at her.

"Do they?"

"Yes, and you, miss, are a great deal higher than they are. So young and already so rich, so enormously rich! The mill there, the best in all the land. Zounds, that's enough for any one! And you only a girl, hardly eighteen yet, and—master of such a mill! It's wonderful, wonderful!"

The maiden laughed aloud.

"Well, it belongs to me now, and won't I worry you to death, you dear old Franz! Where is Susanne?"

"She is in her room; she's bad again, poor old body. The housekeeping becomes hard for her now. Doctor Bruck is with her."

The young lady gave him her hand and turned away and entered the house. The heavy oak door closed with a bang behind her, making the walls shake with the clash and noise, and the dust fly up in showers about her. As she passed on through the corn-room into the house, the perfume of the grain arrested her attention, and caused her to pause, bringing back to her memory the time she had lived in this house as a little girl. For a moment the bright color fled from her

cheeks, and her steps faltered as she thought of the difference between her childhood and her present position.

Yes, she had always loved to "creep about" the mill, as the old lady in the villa had remarked, and with a sigh she remembered how often "dear papa" had shaken the flour from her long hair and frock, as he kissed her and called her his white little mill mouse. The gloomy old man, her grandfather, who so rarely spoke to her and never loved her, out of whose way she would run into Susanne's bright kitchen or slip away to Franz in his room, perhaps, if he could see her now, might forgive her for being the cause of his daughter's death, since she had grown so like her grandmother.

She passed on and came at last to the corner room, but the door was locked, so, not being able to enter, she turned aside down a small corridor and had just reached the top of a back flight of steps, when the sound of a complaining voice arrested her attention.

"This must be Susanne's bedroom," she thought, as she opened the door without knocking and walked in.

It was a miserably poor uncomfortable room, dark and damp and with scarcely any furniture worth mentioning. A warm sickly current of air greeted her as she entered, and the first thing that she saw in the dim light was the tall broad-shouldered figure of a man standing with his back toward her. He was evidently just about to depart, for he had his hat and stick in his hand.

"That must be Doctor Bruck," the girl thought to herself. "Franz said he was with Susanne."

And then she remembered that her guardian had written some six months ago and informed her of the engagement of her beautiful half-sister Flora to a young doctor, who had loved her from the time he was a student, though of course he had not told his love to the rich proud girl till he had something of a position to offer her. Since then Kathe had heard no more about the young couple, and had forgotten the circumstance till the mention of Dr. Bruck's name by Franz and finding him here by Susanne's bedside brought him back to her memory. It was either the rustling of her silk dress or the sweet breath of pure air she brought in with her which caused the tall figure to turn suddenly round and open his eyes in astonishment at the figure standing in the door-way.

"Doctor Bruck? I am Kathe Mangold," the girl said, hurriedly; then, not waiting for him to speak, she moved quickly to the bedside, and stretched out both her hands to the old woman propped up on the pillows.

Susanne stared at the young lady in dull surprise.

"I have walked in like the fresh air, haven't I, dear Susanne? And at the right time, too," she said, cheerfully, as she smoothed the gray hair on the old woman's forehead, and pushed an untidy lock into its place under her night-cap. "How can you like to be in such a wretched room as this? The stove smokes and I can see the mildew on the walls. How can you prefer such a garret to the nice corner chamber? Did no one tell you you were to have that room, and sleep in the cabinet at the side?" asked the girl, as a slight frown dimmed the smile on her lips.

"Yes, the counselor said I was to go there, but I should grow silly if I sat in that room all day alone like a grand lady, or I should become like the poor dear master, now dead and gone."

The young lady bit her lip to keep from laughing.

"But, Susanne, when grandpapa was alive you could sit there if you liked, you know. Your spinning-wheel used to stand in the window—and I can remember many a time putting it out of order—and on the drawers stood your work-basket. Doctor," she said, suddenly moving nearer the young man, "will it do her any harm if she changes her room?"

"By no means—I have urged the same thing, but my patient opposes me at every turn," he replied, with a shrug of his shoulders, in a sonorous but well modulated voice.

"Then there's no need to lose any time," said Kathe, decidedly, as she took off her gloves and jacket and laid them on the bed.

"Nothing'll make me go there," exclaimed the old housekeeper. "Don't, please don't, Fraulein Kathe," she begged, in a whining tone. "That room is the apple of my eye—ever since I heard you were coming I have scrubbed and cleaned it from morning till night, to make it nice for you—only the day afore yesterday I put clean curtains up. No, no, I can't go, I won't."

"Very well, you can do as you like. I did intend asking you to give me a cup of coffee in the mill this afternoon, as you used to do when I was a child. However, as you are so obstinate, I sha'n't come at all, of that you may be quite sure. I shall only stay a month in M——, and then you may let any one you like sleep in the clean room with the fresh curtains; I don't care!"

That was enough; the girl's manner was so cool and determined that the young doctor judged this was not the first time she had had to manage a wayward invalid.

Susanne sighed, but she slowly put her hand under the pillow and drew forth a key which she laid on the sheets.

Kathe quietly took it up, and going over to the wood-basket by the stove, said, as she lifted two or three of the billets in her strong young arms:

"Wait a little, while I light the fire in the corner room."

"No, that you can't do, I'm sure," said Dr. Bruck quickly, as he glanced expressively at her elegant toilet—at the same time laying his hat and stick on the table.

"Then I ought to be ashamed of myself if I can't," she replied, earnestly, but with heightened color, for she had remarked the young man's doubtful look.

She left the apartment and a few moments later the fire was burning brightly in the stove of the corner room, while Dr. Bruck, who had followed her, opened the windows, in order that the fresh spring air might chase away the close atmosphere of the place.

"I beg you to notice, Doctor Bruck, that I have lighted the fire, and that my hands are still presentable for a drawing-room," remarked Kathe after awhile as she held out her slender rosy-tipped fingers for his inspection, with a mocking smile playing around her mouth.

He glanced at the young girl, and answered her smile with one as full of expression and fun as her own, but he did not reply in words. He was trying to close one of the windows, through which the wind came with so much force that it blew the hair from off Kathe's temples and disarranged one of the curtains at the other side of the room.

"Shut it quick, or the other curtains will come to grief," laughed Kathe, catching at the muslin and holding it back till the window was closed; then adding in a vexed tone, but with her eyes full of earnest feeling:

"Poor old Susanne! if she could guess how little I appreciate these clean curtains! I suppose I must let them remain though, as they were put up expressly for me—but the idea of muslin before *such* windows, and in this handsome mediæval room, too! It's too bad, indeed it is! And I have been dreaming that I would like to have this apartment refitted in the style of three hundred years ago—with round oriel windows, and folding oak seats here in these recesses, and the heavy door ornamented with iron, for I am convinced that it was there once, and that grandpapa had it removed—you can see the marks of the old iron straps. And now there will have to be instead a spinning-wheel in this window, with old Susanne on a chair beside it!" and she sighed after a moment, adding:

"I had planned it all out so nicely, and now I know she won't let me touch it."

"But I don't understand—you are the mistress here, are you not?" asked the doctor, hesitatingly, and looking at this girl with one of his grave searching glances.

"Oh, yes, I know that, but I shall never be able to assert my authority in such matters, I am convinced beforehand—I am a born coward," she replied, in a low tone, but the contrast between this meek confession and the bright fearless bearing of the young lady appeared so ludicrous that it was not till the doctor had glanced again into the shy soft brown eyes that he could believe she spoke the truth concerning her want of courage to assert her authority respecting any wishes of her own.

Quietly moving from the window, Kathe began arranging the furniture for the comfort of the invalid. The large broad sofa was turned into a bed, her grandfather's old leather arm-chair was drawn out of the draught by the window and placed nearer the stove, a little table was fetched from the adjoining cabinet and put by the chair, as also a rather high foot-stool, which she discovered in one of the corners, all of which Kathe did in a quick independent way, as if she were accustomed to do this kind of thing every day of her life. It almost seemed, as she flitted about the room, as if she must have forgotten the presence of the young man standing in the embrasure of the window. But presently she opened the top drawer of the press, and took out a white linen table-cloth bordered with red, which she unfolded and spread over the table by the easy-chair, saying, as she turned her face partly toward him:

"There is something very pleasant in this old-fashioned order. Everything remains in its own place, just as it used to be in the good old time. It was all so before I was born, and see, nothing has changed during my six years' absence—how home-like it is!"

Then pointing to the mirror over the low antique press, she added:

"And there's a corner of the almanac sticking out from behind the frame-work of the glass on which grandpapa wrote his memoranda, and up above there still hangs his rod with the faded ribbons which many a time used to make my mother tremble."

"And you, too?"

"Oh, no, he never took enough notice of poor little me to care what I did," replied Kathe, with an air of amused resignation, as she began dusting the window-ledges with the long

feather brush. "We must have flowers here on this window-seat," she remarked, after a moment's pause; "poor old Susanne will enjoy their perfume. I will beg a hyacinth and a pot of violets from my brother-in-law, he has so many in his winter garden, and—"

"You will have to ask old Madame Urach first; the winter garden is her pet amusement, and no one touches a flower without her sanction."

Kathe opened her eyes wide with astonishment as she answered:

"Are they so very formal in their manners at the villa? Why, I remember that when papa lived the winter garden belonged to the whole family. But then," and she shrugged her shoulders significantly, "my father's mother-in-law was only a guest from time to time at the villa. However, it does not matter. It's just as well that I came to the Mill-house first," she went on, thoughtfully, though her well modulated voice had a sharp ring in it as she threw back her head, and looked earnestly at her companion; "being here will accustom me to all that formality before I am forced to—"

Dr. Bruck turned suddenly from the window, and drew nearer the young girl.

"But what if they are angry over there at your not going to them first?" he asked, quickly, interrupting her with a slight tone of warning in his voice, as if he were anxious to give her a little advice which he felt conscious would not be heeded.

"If they are they have no right to be," she replied, without hesitation, while the color deepened on her cheeks. "Over there is nothing more to me than if it were a stranger's house, that is as regards taking care of me, and affection. My stepsisters and I are nothing to each other; there is not even the link of the briefest correspondence between us. Now and then I have written to Moriz, but then he is my guardian as well as my brother-in-law. When he married my half-sister they lived in the town; besides she died very soon. Henriette, as you know, always lived with her grandmamma. I remember that when I was quite a little girl in the nursery, Flora had the management of our house; she was very beautiful, and very clever, but she must have wonderfully changed if one does not feel oppressed and insignificant in her presence. I never dared talk to her or even caress her lovely hand, and I think that now I am older, it would be very impertinent on my part if I were to expect from her the affection usual between sisters—and—"

She interrupted herself suddenly and looked wistfully up in his face, but he turned his head toward the window and gazed out on the scenery, not helping her with a syllable of reply.

After a pause she went on.

"As things are I can not regard the villa as my home; I have no right there, and if I went I should only be treated as a guest, and be no more to them than any other visitor. But here in this Mill-house I stand on my own rights; I am mistress here—here I am surrounded by home feelings and home associations, and I have no doubt that the old roof overhead and Franz and Susanne's care will shield me from all harm as completely as the formality and etiquette of the family over there would at all events," and a merry smile flitted over her fresh young face. "By staying here I shall escape all censure much sooner than you think for, doctor; they won't expect *manners* from the 'miller's mouse.'"

And without waiting for the doctor's reply Kathe went over to the fire, opened the brass door of a tiny oven half-way up the porcelain stove, and taking from her pocket a small bottle of *eau-de-Cologne*, poured a few drops of the liquid on the heated iron plate. Immediately a pleasant perfume pervaded the air of the apartment.

"Susanne will feel much better when she comes here," she remarked, as her eyes wandered round the room to see if all was in order. Then, as her glance fell on the open door of the inner cabinet, through which the painted bedstead could be seen, standing near to the window, and she recognized the familiar yellow roses on its head and foot-boards, her face grew pale, even her lips were white as she whispered:

"It was there grandpapa died."

The young doctor shook his head, and pointed silently to the window corner of the room in which they were now standing.

"Were you with him?" she asked, gently, as she stepped closer to him.

"Yes."

"He died so suddenly, and my brother-in-law announced the sad event to me in such a very few words that I have not yet heard the cause of his death."

When Kathe spoke the doctor had his profile turned toward her. His mustache and beard were very thick, but Kathe, who was looking earnestly at him, noticed that he pressed his lips together as if the words she had just uttered pained him. After a momentary pause he slowly moved round, and meet-

ing her earnest gaze, and looking her full in the eyes, he said, gravely, in a voice that trembled with emotion:

"You will be told, fraulein, that he died from my want of skill in performing the operation."

The young girl shrunk back with fear, for a moment her eyes were fastened on the lips which had spoken, as if questioning the accuracy of his speech; then they dropped on the ground.

"For the express purpose of calming your fears you must allow me to add, that such a statement is entirely false," he went on in a low earnest tone; "but how can I expect you to believe me?" he added, bitterly. "We meet to-day for the first time, and naturally know nothing of each other."

She might have replied by some superficial remark vaguely expressive of sympathy for the painful position he evidently found himself in respecting the death of the miller; but it did not occur to Kathe to utter it. He was right in saying that she could not judge if he were innocent or guilty. He certainly did not look like a man who could deliberately make a false statement; and the girl gave a shy glance at the face before her. She felt intuitively that he would not purposely raise suspicions in her mind, and then condescend to calm them unless he had good reason for so doing. And as she was not capable at the moment of expressing her own thoughts she was silent.

He had not expected her to answer, but after a moment's silence he turned away with so much pride and dignity in the movement that Kathe felt a glow of shame creep over her; her cheeks became crimson as she whispered audibly:

"I fully believe you. Shall I fetch Susanne now?" then she asked, in a timid voice, wondering why she suddenly felt as if she had behaved like a naughty child, and offended the dignified grave-looking man standing so still by the window.

"Certainly."

She left the room as quickly as possible with the tears trembling on her eyelashes. But she dashed them away ere entering the garret where the old housekeeper sat, partly dressed with a shawl wrapped round her, ready to move into the larger room in obedience to the young mistress's will.

"Tell me about grandpapa's death, Susanne," demanded Kathe, sitting down on a low stool by the old woman. "How was it he died?"

Susanne began at once and related the events of the late master's illness and death to her listener as well as she could and as she knew them, adding in a querulous tone:

"The affair seems to have done the young doctor no end of harm. At first every one ran after him and thought lots of him, but after master's death they all began to whisper he didn't know his business well. That's just like people. Fraulein Kathe! He was *not* in fault about the operation that was all right, I know, for I saw it with my own eyes. The master was ordered to be very quiet after it was all over—he quiet, indeed! I should think I ought to know best about his being able to keep himself quiet. Why, if Franz spoke a bit loud or a cart drove too quick into the yard he was in a rage in a moment. Indeed he was; I have had enough to do to bear with him, I can assure you, fraulein, and the thanks I get is not a penny left me—and, but for you, I should have to beg in my old age."

Kathe held up her finger in warning.

"Well, well, I'll be still and say nothing," muttered the old woman as Kathe put another shawl round her to keep her warm. "But I do think it's hard for that good kind man, the doctor, to have his reputation blackened, and his bread taken away, and he doing so much for his old aunt, too; why, he supports her now because she gave him her bit of money to keep him while he studied. She lives with him, and is as proud of him as a body can be, and now she'll have to suffer, too."

But Kathe had lived too many years among her Dresden friends to feel any very strong interest in the private family history of her half-sister Flora's lover just now; she regretted vaguely for Dr. Bruck's sake that circumstances had been against the complete success of the operation, but she was too much occupied in thinking of her old grandfather's illness and death to care what the towns-people might or might not say respecting the skill of the physician. Putting her strong young arms round the feeble body of the old housekeeper, Kathe partly lifted and partly led her out of her old garret into the more comfortable quarters she had prepared for her. The door of the corner room was open, and when Susanne appeared on the threshold Dr. Bruck left his place by the stove, and stretching out both his hands, lifted the tottering old woman up in his arms, and placed her as gently and tenderly as a mother would her child on the comfortable pillows in the old-fashioned easy-chair.

A few moments later Kathe had covered her feet with a warm flannel, and put them on the stool, drawn the little table within easy reach of her hand, and fastened back the clean muslin curtain in order that she might have an uninter-

rupted view from the window, while the old housekeeper muttered half-finished sentences of delight at really finding herself in the "grand room," and being able to watch and count each sack of flour as it was loaded or unloaded in the yard.

Taking from its pocket her tiny gold watch, and looking at the hour, Kathe said, with a slight gesture expressive of amused despair:

"It is time I went to the villa or I shall arrive in the middle of Madame Urach's formal tea hour, and disturb her proud guests." Then putting on her gloves, she added: "I shall be back in an hour, Susanne, to cook your supper for you."

"With those white hands of yours?" exclaimed the old woman in amazement.

"With these white hands of mine, certainly. Did you imagine they were always idle in Dresden? if you did, Susanne, you did not know my dear Lucas; she is just the same now as she always was—ever busy and never idle. You ought to see her—her equal is not to be found—she is a model doctor's wife!" laughed the young girl, as she nodded her head and left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE clock was striking five as Kathe passed through the court-yard on her way to the villa, accompanied by Dr. Bruck. The air was much colder, and the sun-dial, which a couple of hours before had brightly and distinctly marked the hour of the day, now looked gray and dull in the overcast atmosphere.

The tinkling of the gate-bell brought old Franz out on the doorstep, followed by his wife, who stretched her long neck over her husband's shoulder to have a peep at the new young mistress. Kathe spoke kindly to the woman, and begged her to go up to the Mill-house and take care of Susanne during her absence at the villa, which she promised faithfully to do directly.

Kathe was about to continue her road, when a violent concussion was felt in the air, and a moment later a pretty little dove fell wounded and helpless on the stones at her feet.

"The devil! the villains are carrying this too far!" growled old Franz, as he stooped to pick up the poor little bird shot through the wing. "Look here, wife; this is none o' ours—I thought so—they are some vagabonds from over there, shooting the poor lady's pigeons right under her nose. I wish I was the counselor—wouldn't they catch it!" he added, under his breath, and shaking his horny fist.

"Who is the poor lady, Franz, and who shoots her pigeons?" asked Kathe, opening wide her eyes with astonishment.

"He means Henriette," remarked the doctor.

"And it's them at the spinning-mill who shoots," growled Franz between his teeth.

"What, the hands in my brother-in-law's mill?"

"Yes, *fraulein*, they who eat his bread; I say it's a crying shame and sin. A fine business, isn't it, doctor? Now you can see for yourself what they are made of, and the good that comes of soft measures, and—"

"Are the men on strike here?" asked Kathe, turning to Dr. Bruck, who had such a sweet earnest smile on his face that the girl could not resist giving him a second look.

"No, on the contrary," he replied shaking his head, his quiet well-bred voice sounding in pleasant contrast to the excited tones of the foreman, "several of the upper workmen at the mill have saved a little money, and when the estate was being divided off into lots they went to your brother-in-law Moriz and begged they might have a bit of useless land lying near the flour manufactory, for the purpose of building a few houses, to let out in rooms to those of their fellow-workmen who could not afford the high rents for lodgings in town. The counselor promised it to them—all the more readily because the bit of land in question is in reality an outlying portion of the park, and—"

"Pardon my interrupting you, Herr Doctor," broke in Franz, "but that's just why he couldn't do it. Directly I heard of it I knew Madame Urach would never allow it; and how could one blame her for not choosing to have neighbors of that sort about her? The ladies were very angry about it, I can tell you, and insisted that the open bit of land remain as it was, for they meant to have some plants there, and that put an end to all hope for the men at the manufactory. As you may imagine, the men are furious, and revenge themselves whenever they get a chance."

"A mean revenge, too! Poor little innocent thing!" said Kathe, taking the pigeon out of Franz's hand.

"The lamentable part of this business is that this one act of barbarity will react as a punishment on the whole lot, and no one can blame proud old Madame Urach for not wishing to have such ruffians in her neighborhood," said Dr. Bruck, with a grave face.

"I don't see why. There are wicked and mean, revengeful persons in every class of life," broke in Kathe, impulsively; "I know a great deal about the lower classes, for the doctor

in whose house I have been living had a number of poor patients, and often when he thought medicine would do no good, his wife, my dear old governess, used to help him by taking soup and nourishing things instead to their homes, and I always went with her. Sometimes, of course, we met with roughness and ingratitude—but generally with the reverse; want and misery are always heart-rending to witness, and—”

“But not so bad in reality as you think, fraulein; the people dissemble very often,” interrupted Franz, waving his hand. Kathe looked at him quietly for a moment ere she answered in a mocking tone:

“What a grand man you have become, Franz! Of whom do you speak? Don’t you belong to the people yourself? You are at the head of the mill now, but what were you once? Only a laborer, a common workman like the rest of them in the manufactory, a workman who had to bear many a hard injustice, too, as I happen to know.”

The foreman’s weather-beaten old face flushed a dark and angry red, as the young lady, his mistress, reminded him in such plain unmistakable words of his position. For a moment or two he was silent after she had finished speaking, then stretching out his broad horny hand toward her, he said, simply: “I didn’t mean it, fraulein; I meant no harm.”

“At heart you are not bad, but you have been a fortunate man, Franz, and are hard on those who never get on,” she replied, as she laid her small hand for a second in his, but the grave expression on his face did not so easily disappear.

Taking out her handkerchief she tenderly laid it over the suffering bird, and tying the four corners together, hung it on her finger as if it had been a basket, saying as she nodded farewell to the foreman:

“I will take the tiny invalid to Henriette.”

“I think this will be the shortest way,” remarked the doctor, opening a small door leading direct from the court-yard into the park, and standing aside to let Kathe pass through.

“I recognize nothing here,” said the young girl, when they were outside, as she stared around with a perplexed look on her face. “It seems to me as if this part of the park had been taken up and shaken together by giant hands. What are they doing down there?” she asked, pointing in the direction of an open space, where some workmen’s heads just appeared above ground.

“They are digging a lake. Madame Urach has a fancy for looking at swans swimming about on a broad sheet of water.”

"And they are building over there on the south side; what is that to be?"

"A palm-house, I believe."

"Moriz must be very rich," she said, thoughtfully.

"It is said he is," was the quiet answer, but uttered in a tone that gave no indication of the speaker's private opinion on the subject.

Standing in the full light of the open air, far enough away for her to observe him at his ease, Kathe noticed what a very remarkable-looking man her companion was. His dignified military bearing and handsome sunburned countenance, with its brown heavy mustache and curling beard, and the clear straightforward expression shining in his eyes, made her intuitively feel that the misfortune which had happened to him in the miller's death had not come to him from want of firmness and self-possession, or from any overconfidence in his own skill.

"He would do nothing rash, I am sure, and his face is too noble willfully to injure another if he could help it," thought the young girl, her mind still dwelling on the strange statement she had heard from his own lips, when she questioned him about her grandfather's death.

"Shall I lead you, fraulein?"

She started, and giving a bewildering glance over the broken and filled-in pathways, accepted the arm Dr. Bruck offered her. Her hand had not rested for two minutes on the doctor's coat-sleeve, when she suddenly drew it away again, and standing still, exclaimed with a merry, silvery laugh: "What a coward I am! I do believe I'm nervous! Do you think I shall see Flora directly I arrive at the house?" and her laugh changed into a deep-drawn sigh. The young man's face flushed as he replied in a constrained tone:

"As far as I know she is out driving;" then, as if to avoid another question, he went on quickly, "you will find the whole household in a state of excitement to-day, on account of the nobility which has just been conferred on Moriz."

"And you only tell me that *now*!" she cried. "What is it for? What has he done?"

"Well, he has done a great deal to raise and improve the commercial interests of the land," he answered, as quickly and eagerly as if there had been a doubt about it; "and Moriz has such a large heart—he does a great deal for the poor."

Kathe shook her head.

"He is a very lucky fellow, but it makes me feel anxious"

"' Lucky!' repeated the young man; "that depends upon how he regards the change himself."

"As a great blessing," she replied, decidedly. "I know that Moriz's chief aim in life is to rise high in social position. His last letter to me was full of self-congratulation and rapture that my fortune was far beyond what he had been led to expect."

Doctor Bruck did not answer directly: he walked on several yards ere he asked, with a side glance at the young girl:

"And you—do *you* not care to be richer than you thought for?"

Kathe bent her head gracefully forward, and looked him straight in the face.

"You appear to expect a very decided answer from me—a very earnest No; but unfortunately, with the best will in the world, I can not bring myself to utter it. I think it is a very pleasant thing to be rich."

He laughed softly to himself, but did not reply. Very soon, by rapid walking, they had reached the linden avenue, where the long, broad pathway had lately been freshly graveled. Hurrying forward to the opposite side of the avenue, the young girl stood still, and pointing to a distant wooden bridge formed of a few branches of trees roughly fastened together across the running river, cried out joyfully:

"Ah, the dear old friend is standing there still!"

"That leads to the property on the other side of the river—"

"I know, beyond the meadow and fruit garden—but beyond that again stands an old lovely little house. In former times it was a kind of farm belonging to the castle, and when I was here it used to be covered with a vine, and had broad stone steps leading to the hall door. It was always so quiet and still there. Susanne always bleached the linen in the garden, and in spring the ground was blue with violets; I always hunted for the first violet there, I remember."

"And you can do it again if you like—the place has become mine since this morning," he answered, casting a warm look toward the distant tiny estate.

Kathe thanked him and flushed slightly as she thoughtfully and slowly walked along the gravel pathway, wondering if her sister Flora would one day inhabit that small house as its mistress. If Flora with her proud bearing and the majestic sweep of her trailing skirts, who never considered any drawing-room in which she happened to be present too large or too costly in furniture, if Flora with her unbending ambition and love of

display could bring herself to live in that old-fashioned house with its Dutch tiles and deal floors, then, indeed, she must be greatly changed from the haughty ambitious girl she had been six years ago!

From this and other thoughts of a similar kind, Kathe was roused presently by the sound of approaching wheels. She looked up and saw that they were so near the villa that she could have traced the pattern of the lace curtains hanging at the windows. Inside the house all seemed still, but along the carriage-drive leading to the grand entrance, a pair of magnificent bay horses came trotting nearer and nearer, drawing a handsome low phaeton, as bright and shining as only a new phaeton can be. A lady held the reins with a light, firm hand. She was wrapped from head to foot in rich, costly fur—the white drooping feather in her hat well became the classical beauty of her face, and contrasted exquisitely with the golden color of her hair, one braid of which had escaped from its fastening, and hung over the rich, dark fur on her shoulder.

“Flora! how lovely she is!” cried Kathe, with enthusiasm, as she stretched out her hand toward the passing carriage, but neither Flora nor the counselor, who sat by her side, seemed to have noticed the girl, for the elegant phaeton rolled rapidly onward till it stopped before the portal of the villa.

Two or three pebbles suddenly flew past Kathe, evidently struck unconsciously with the doctor's heavy walking-stick, and then, for the first time, the girl remarked that she was some distance in advance of her companion. She turned to meet him, and fancied that he seemed more reserved and colder in mien than he had been hitherto, and as she neared him she could hardly repress a satirical smile from appearing on her face as she saw him glance at her figure, and then quickly fix his eyes on some other object, for she knew that she had detected him in the thought: “What an ungainly creature this girl is, in comparison with my beautiful betrothed.”

“I am astonished at the cool courage Flora displays in driving,” she observed, when he was close beside her again.

“Her companion's contempt for death is much more to be wondered at. Those young horses were only bought yesterday, and the counselor is trying them for the first time to-day,” he answered, between his teeth; and Kathe felt that the man must be strongly moved to speak in such a tone. She did a wise thing and was silent, half frightened at the moody expression which had settled on her companion's face.

CHAPTER V.

NOT a word more was spoken by either till they reached the house and had entered the hall, where a man-servant stood watching the disappearance of the phaeton.

"Is the master at home?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, and the ladies also; they are all in the winter garden," was the answer.

"In madame's apartments," thought Kathe to herself. She had recovered her composure and usual calm manner, and, taking a card from her bag, she handed it to the man, saying:

"Take that to the Herr Counselor."

"Standing on etiquette here?" said Dr. Bruck, smiling, when the footman had noiselessly tripped over the Persian hall carpets and disappeared behind a door.

"On etiquette! certainly," she replied, earnestly, adding: "It is far the best; an unannounced entrance among the family would be bad taste on my part. As it is, I am very much afraid that I shall place the master in an awkward predicament by my unceremonious appearance."

She had barely finished speaking when a door opened on the left side of the hall, and the counselor appeared.

"Good gracious, Kathe, you here!" he stammered out, in a voice that was anything but joyous in its ring.

Drawing up her figure to its full height the young girl walked across to her brother-in-law, and bowing gracefully, said, with gentle dignity:

"You must not be vexed, dear Moriz, at my forestalling your intentions; I considered myself quite old enough to come without being fetched. I am no longer a child."

He looked at her for a moment as if petrified, then recovering his wits he said slowly, as he scanned her critically from head to foot:

"Yes, you are quite right, Kathe. You are no longer the child I used to lead by the hand. Now, welcome here!"

Then noticing the doctor's presence for the first time, he added, as he gave him his hand:

"You two met in the hall—let me introduce you at once to—"

"No need to do that, Moriz! I did it for myself a couple of hours ago," interrupted the young girl, with a mischievous

smile. "Doctor Bruck was calling on his patient Susanne, when I arrived at the Mill-house."

The counselor's brow became clouded.

"You went to the mill first?" he said, in an embarrassed manner. "But, dear child, Grandmamma Urach has very kindly expressed her intention of receiving you, and you ought to have come direct to her, instead of going first to see your old friend Susanne the old housekeeper. For goodness' sake, don't mention it in there!" he whispered, earnestly.

"Do you really expect that from me?" said Kathe, her clear ringing tones sounding almost startling in contrast to the counselor's anxious whisper. "I can not tell a falsehood if the subject is mentioned—I have no love for secrecy, Moriz; but if"—and for an instant she shrunk back speechless at the dark glow which overspread his face, then, as it faded away and left him paler than usual, she went on courageously—"if I have done wrong, I sha'n't mind acknowledging it; it will not cost me my head, I suppose!"

"If you take a kindly hint in that tragic fashion, then of course I have nothing more to say," he replied, somewhat sharply. "It won't cost you your head, but it will considerably increase the difficulty of your position in my house. However, do as you will! You will soon find out for yourself if such direct straightforwardness will answer in the refined circle you will mix in here!" he added, more facetiously than he had yet spoken, as he led the way to the dining-room adjoining the winter garden, and opened the door.

But inside it was no longer the simply furnished old-fashioned room Kathe remembered. The wall which had separated it from the winter garden had been removed, and in its place two or three handsome columns supported the ceiling, of exquisite color and design, at the base of which a bronze grating ornamented with gold connected the columns with the sides of the room, and divided the highly polished inlaid flooring of the apartment from the tessellated pavement of the winter garden. Behind the grating it was one mass of flowers and evergreens; sweet-scented may-flowers perfumed the air, costly Parma violets grew in rich luxuriance at the foot of a handsome dragon-tree, and everywhere the rarest and choicest plants were arranged in artistic order; the whole place framed in by daintily ornamented walls and stained glass windows. From the roof above the pillars hung several baskets of richly colored trailing creepers, under one of which Flora was standing as the door opened. She still wore her costly furs; one of the creeping branches of the clematis attached to the

columns had caught across her hat, as she held up her black satin skirt with one hand, while the other rested gracefully against the columns, as soft and creamy in its color as the clematis bloom above her head.

As Kathe's tall figure advanced into the room, she raised her eyebrows with an air of astonishment not unmingled with curiosity, followed a moment later by a sudden drooping of the eyelids, while a sarcastic smile flitted round her lips.

"Now, Flora, guess whom I have brought!" cried the counselor.

"That won't take me long or be difficult either. It is Kathe, who has evidently traveled here alone," replied Flora, in her usual prompt and decided manner. "Besides, any one who knew old Frau Sommer must see in an instant that this tall girl with her pink and white apple-blossom face must be her granddaughter. But her eyes and hair are strikingly like your late wife's, Moriz; Clotilde's eyes were exactly like hers at her age."

With a supple movement she freed herself from the clinging clematis bough, and stepping toward her young half-sister, bent her head to kiss her.

Yes, that was Flora, unaltered in any outward respect, except perhaps that the lines about the mouth and chin were slightly harder, from long years of constant indulgence of power and command. With the same cool, indifferent manner as she had kissed her sister after six years' separation she now turned to Dr. Bruck and said, as she carelessly held out her hand, not as a girl greeting her lover, but rather as if two college chums were addressing each other:

"How do, Bruck?"

The young man took her hand for a moment and then let it go again without any reply to her laconic greeting.

This state of perfect indifference of manner between the betrothed pair seemed to be an understood thing with the counselor, but Kathe, whose experience of lovers was of a very different kind, could hardly repress her astonishment, and gazed from one to the other in silent perplexed amazement.

"Grandmamma!" cried Flora, turning her head in the direction of the winter garden with a malicious twinkle in her expressive eyes—"grandmamma, our little one has given you and your family the pleasure of looking at her a month before she was expected."

At Flora's first call the elderly lady emerged from behind a group of camellia plants, regarding with a keen curiosity, unknown to herself, perhaps, the young girl just arrived; but at

the conclusion of Flora's mischievous remark, Mme. Urach knit her brows in an ominous frown, and her pale face colored with displeasure as she replied in an icy tone:

"I am not aware that I ever expressed any great curiosity for 'looking at' your sister, as you say, Flora. When I expressed my pleasure at Kathe's coming among us, and said that she would be welcome, it was because she is the daughter of your dear departed father, and your sister."

And so saying, she moved a few steps forward, and held out both her hands as if to embrace the young girl; but Kathe, pretending not to see her intention, courtesied with a low ceremonious bow before the old lady, as if she now for the first time in her life stood in the presence of her father's proud mother-in-law. An observant looker-on would have divined the motive for this strange act on the young girl's part from the sarcastic curl of her lip, but the old lady accepted it as a simple mark of the deep respect her presence excited in the mind of her lately arrived guest, and kissing her on the forehead, her eyes glancing uneasily toward the door as if expecting Kathe's traveling companion to enter, she said:

"Did you really come alone, as Flora suggested?"

"Certainly I did, madame; I wished to try how I could get on independent of any one, and my kind governess said I was quite right," replied Kathe, unconsciously passing her fingers over the place the elder lady had touched with her cold lips.

"Yes, of course, that is just like her," said Mme. Urach, with a smile of pitying scorn hovering about her mouth. "She was always a very independent person, and your dear papa spoiled her, my dear, and let her do exactly as she liked, though, of course, I must allow she always did right—"

"And judiciously, too—and that is why, I have no doubt, that papa confided to her care his untamable youngest daughter," broke in Kathe, in the free, unembarrassed manner that was her special charm—but which did not seem to please Mme. Urach.

Shrugging her shoulders with a deprecating air, the old lady replied:

"Your father did what he thought best for your welfare, dear Kathe, and I have never been in the habit of criticising his actions. But he was a man who had a great admiration for decorum of manner in ladies, and—I wonder what he would have thought of his little daughter's impulsive proceeding in arriving at home in this sudden and unceremonious way?"

"I can't say," replied Kathe. "But papa would have known and acknowledged whose blood ran in his child's veins

—miller's blood, madame, able and willing to face the world fearlessly."

The counselor cleared his throat and stroked his handsome mustache at the conclusion of this bold remark, and "Grandmamma" looked as if she had suddenly encountered a blast of cold air straight in the face, but Flora laughed aloud and clapped her hands as she exclaimed:

"Good gracious, child, how ingenuous you are! Grandmamma," she added, turning with a malicious gleam in her eyes to the elderly lady who had recovered her usual calm manner. "Grandmamma, Kathe should be made to repeat that sentiment the first time she is present at one of Moriz's grand entertainments—wouldn't it make everybody open their eyes!"

"My dear, I shall trust to Kathe's inborn tact and refined taste to know what to say under *such* circumstances," answered the old lady, shaking hands with the doctor, and parting her thin lips in one of her peculiar smiles, that no one was quite certain whether it was meant in sweetness or in bitterness.

"Tact, tact, that's all very well to say," said Flora, shaking her head, incredulously. "Freedom from conventional restraint seems also inborn. The fault lies in that her old governess does not seem to have understood how to teach her worldly wisdom. However, I for my part am glad you have come alone, Kathe, and I think it is better for you to be alone and independent than tied to the apron-strings of your old-fashioned homely governess."

Kathe had taken off her hat, the perfumed heat of the room making her feel too warm—and thus displaying the coils of golden-brown hair crowning her head, which made her appear even taller than before.

"Homely?—my dear old Lucas homely?" she cried, scornfully throwing back her head with a graceful movement that well became her young supple figure. "A more refined, poetical woman is would be difficult to imagine."

"Oh, yes, grows enthusiastic over the moon, and copies sentimental verses—or perhaps she composes herself, is that it?"

The young girl fixed her glowing eyes with a proud look on the face of her half-sister as she answered, after a moment's hesitation:

"She does not copy sentimental verses, but her husband's manuscripts, because his handwriting is difficult to decipher—and she does not write novels and poetry because she has no time, and yet there is plenty of poetry in her. Ah, yes, Flora,

you may laugh and be sarcastic, as of old, but you can't make me alter my opinion of my dear old governess. She brings the poetry of her nature into every-day use, in the charming way she manages her house, and makes her simple home a place of love and happiness—every corner of the house she seems to fill with her bright smile and pleasant thoughts as she looks after the comfort of her hard-working husband, my troublesome self, and anybody and everybody about her."

"Bravo, Kathe!" cried Henriette, emerging from the winter garden, throwing a handful of fresh-gathered violets against the young girl's bosom, from whence they fell to the floor. "Bravo! I would rush over and embrace you, but—look at me," she added, as she pressed her hands together across her breast, and leaned against the bronze grating; "look at me—and—don't you want to laugh? You are so strong and healthy-looking, and I—I—" her voice faltered, and she turned away.

In an instant Kathe was by her side with her arms round the poor little deformed figure, kissing her gently, and with tears rolling down her own cheeks, asking her how it was she had "grown so terribly thin."

Flora bit her lip as she watched the handsome girl bending with such tender solicitude over her weak little half-sister, and a cloud passed across her brow as the unwelcome thought arose, that perhaps this fearless creature, with her bright young face and truth-loving tongue, might prove a thorn in her path by casting a shadow over the hitherto undisputed sway of the proud beauty. The thought seemed to heat her forehead, for she lifted her hat, and pushing her hair from her temples, said, impatiently, as she glanced significantly at the white bundle still hanging from Kathe's wrist:

"Did you bring that very aristocratic-looking parcel with you from Dresden?"

Without deigning a reply to her elder sister's question, Kathe undid the knot of the handkerchief, and, handing the wounded pigeon to Henriette, said, gently:

"It belongs to you; the poor little thing was shot in the wing and fell down on the pavement of the mill court-yard while I stood there."

Thus her visit to the Mill-house was told quite unconsciously, but Mme. Urach did not appear to have noticed the end of Kathe's sentence. With heightened color and a stern expression of countenance she turned to the counselor, and pointing to the wounded bird, said, reproachfully:

"That's the *fourth*, Moriz."

"And my pet, my little silver-headed treasure!" cried Henriette, wiping away the tears that *would* run down her pale, thin cheeks.

"I must entreat you, dear grandmamma, not to reproach me on this subject any more," replied the counselor, white with fear and anger. "I have done all I can to find out the culprit or culprits and put a stop to this sort of thing, but the wretch covers himself behind the phalanx of a couple of hundred of disappointed and exasperated men, and there is really nothing to be done," he added, shrugging his shoulders. "I have begged Henriette over and over again to confine her pigeons to the house till the men have calmed down, but—"

"So we will have to give way, you think? Perhaps that course will be the best to pursue," said the old lady, with bitter sarcasm, as she slightly lifted the lace scarf she wore from her shoulders. "Didn't you say yourself, Moriz, that indifference on our part would only encourage them in their daring? Depend upon it, they will soon tire of shooting tame pigeons, and fly at higher game."

"Then why remain so inactive, grandmamma? They are not so on the other side," remarked Flora, carelessly. "This morning my maid found another threatening letter lying on my window-sill; it was such a dirty, filthy bit of paper that she wouldn't touch it with her fingers, but held it with the fire-tongs while I read it. It is still in her room, Moriz, if you wish to make use of it. There is nothing new in it, of course—always the same phrases. But I should certainly like to know why these men single me out to vent on me their hatred of the upper classes."

Kathe looked up at her sister, and the involuntary thought arose in her mind that it was perhaps not so much the upper classes as a body that were here hated as the proud, haughty, overbearing individual who had been thus singled out as a fitting recipient for these dirty marks of the angry men's intentions.

"Besides, it makes it almost ludicrous that I should be thus threatened, considering they know how interested I am in the social question," continued Flora, with a forced laugh. "I have already published several articles in favor of the working-man."

"Writing alone doesn't accomplish much nowadays," remarked Dr. Bruck, from across the room. "The most powerful pens have worn themselves to the stump in writing on the subject, and yet the movement gains daily more force, and sweeps into air all such written theories."

Every one turned and looked at the doctor, but Flora asked, pointedly:

“What ought to be done, then?”

“What ought to be done?” he repeated, quietly. “Go among the men and examine for yourself the justice of their demands. What’s the use of your attempting to try and solve the problem of ‘the for and against’ from a mass of papers and documents on your table which—”

“But I beg—” and her eyes flashed with an angry glare.

“Which only adds confusion to an already complex question,” he went on, not noticing her interruption. “It is not likely your articles are ever read by the workmen, and if they were, what good could they do? Words, written words, won’t build them houses. But the women related to the masters have great power and influence in these matters if they only knew how to use them, by softening the stern decisions of their husbands and fathers and the masters, and inducing them by gentle persuasions to yield now and again to just demands, even if it appears against their own interests for the moment. But few women take the trouble to think about the questions at all, and if they do, they don’t allow their hearts to speak. They adopt the lamentable method in fashion nowadays of coping with men before the public, quite forgetting that their sphere of action ought to be at home, and that they only increase and widen the breach each time they depart from it.”

Mme. Urach smoothed the folds of her satin dress with her slender hands, and, without any reference to the latter part of Dr. Bruck’s remarks, replied coldly, when he had finished speaking:

“I agree with you, but I am not accustomed to give my alms direct to the poor, so I have no doubt they have no idea either how much or how often I give; still their ignorance on the point does not distress me, not even if it accounts for the rough acts committed lately.”

“These rough doings are disgraceful. No one can condemn them more strongly than I do,” replied Dr. Bruck, coolly, “but—”

“Well, but? You mean, I suppose, that it is we ‘women related to the masters’ who have provoked these outrages—eh?”

“Yes, I do, madame,” boldly answered the young doctor, drawing closer to the old lady. “By preventing the master from assisting his workmen in a very plausible scheme for the benefit of both. The workmen’s demand in this case was not of the exaggerated unjust kind which leads to misery and

vexation of spirit on both sides; they neither asked for nor expected alms; all they want is a little help from the owner of the manufactory to carry on their work more satisfactorily, and to make their daily existence less hard."

The old lady touched him lightly on the arm as she said, in an amiable but cold tone, hoping to end the discussion:

"You are a decided idealist, Herr Doctor."

"No, no, but a philanthropist if you will," he asserted in reply, as he smiled and took up his hat to depart.

Flora was standing with her back toward him, apparently gazing out of the window, but no woman's full face could have expressed stronger anger and annoyance than did the profile of her firmly compressed lips and dilated nostril. That the doctor had been daring enough to openly assert that *she* gathered her ideas, or rather wrote her articles, from the contents of other papers, was simply unbearable. *She*, with her great gifts! But to suggest that it was part of her duty to look personally into the cause and wherefore of these demands; she, who had never put foot over the threshold of her brother-in-law's factory, and to find out for herself *why* she urged with her pen reform—really is too wanting in tact altogether! Besides, if it was necessary to personally inspect the truth before describing it, what was the use of being endowed with imagination and genius? Absurd! Her lover had never, before to-day, made any mention of her literary talents, from "shyness and admiration" she had hitherto believed, and now he suddenly condemns her work in round, plain terms, and—*he!* it is too much.

"Grandmamma!" she exclaimed, with heightened color and knitted brows, "I don't understand your making use of the term 'Idealist!' It seems to me that Doctor Bruck has expressed himself very plainly on the subject. According to him, we ought to give up comfort and luxury and go about in sackcloth and ashes; and, instead of cultivating our talents, cook soup for the peasants. It seems, too, that it is a sin to prefer the quiet and seclusion of our park, and that we ought to enjoy a pack of workmen's children hallooing and screaming under our windows, and if you are not good and submissive to his dictates, behold a specter is placed at our door to frighten us!" then, catching her breath, she added: "Besides, a philanthropist ought to act as well as teach. If things come to the pass he hints at, the specter will do with him as he would with us."

"I have not much to lose," said the doctor, smiling,

Flora hurried a few steps forward, her jacket hanging half on the floor.

"You can't say that now," she answered, cuttingly. "Moriz tells me that to-day you take possession of some property you have bought. Is it really true that you have carried out your threat of yesterday, and purchased that wretched old ruin over the river."

"My *threat*?"

"Well, what else can I call it? You said yesterday that if you bought this place, which to me is the *ne plus ultra* of wretchedness, poverty, and hideousness, that it would take all your savings, and you have purchased it. You can't possibly have bought it for its beauty alone, and that is why I ask you seriously who is going to live there?"

"You have no need to put a foot in it."

"Of course I sha'n't; of that you may be quite certain. I would rather—"

It would be difficult to describe the young doctor's look as he raised his hand to stop whatever was about to follow, but it was sufficient for the purpose, and the rosy lips close in obedience to his strong will.

After a moment's hesitation he said, quietly, as if it were a matter of perfect indifference to him and his betrothed also:

"I intend my aunt to live in the little house, merely reserving to myself a room where I can pass a few hours at my leisure during the summer months."

"Hope you will enjoy it! a special summer residence! And in winter—then?"

"In winter? Then I shall be content with the room that you decided upon for me in our married home."

"Oh! but—I don't care about the house you refer to. It stands at a corner of the street, and the noisy rolling of the carts and carriages will be insufferable when I am working."

"Very well, then, I will give it up and look for another more suitable," he replied, with unmoved equanimity.

Flora turned away shrugging her shoulders, and with an expression of annoyance clouding her beautiful face that made Kathe fancy she would like to stamp her foot if she dared; as it was, she threw back her head, and her eyes flashed fire as she muttered, between her teeth:

"Will he ever understand?"

Just at this moment Mme. Urach rang the bell so violently that the unusually loud clanging was heard on the other side of the house.

The old lady seemed angry and distressed that her grand-

daughter had so little tact as to discuss this painful question with her lover in the presence of a stranger; and to put an end to the unwelcome topic, she said to Kathe:

"You will receive a strange impression of the good feeling and hospitality of our household, my dear. You have not been asked to take off your jacket or to sit down after your journey, and have been obliged, whether you will or not, to listen to discussion on a matter that can not possibly interest you; standing too on the cold marble floor, instead of being taken care of."

Then, when a footman appeared in answer to her ring, she ordered him to tell the housekeeper at once to prepare one of the guest chambers for the young lady's use.

While these orders were being given the counselor helped Kathe take off her heavy fur mantle, and drew up a chair for her to sit on, and Henriette left the winter garden with a deep spot of red on each cheek and the tears in her eyes.

"Won't you stay and have tea with us?" asked the old lady, as Dr. Bruck bowed low before her in token of his departure.

"No, thank you, not to-day. I have two or three patients I must see," he replied, courteously, not noticing the sarcastic curl of Flora's lip as he uttered the words; then he shook hands with her and Moriz, and bowing ceremoniously to Kathe as he had done to the old lady, he left the room.

"Flora," said Mme. Urach, in a sweet tone, as soon as the door was closed on the doctor's retreating figure, "I must beg that for the future you will avoid the repetition of such scenes as we have just had to witness. You have elected to be free, or rather to act as you think best—good. Up to the present time I have not interfered with you in the slightest degree; but I will not allow you to act as you have just thought fit to do in my presence—I absolutely forbid it! Must I repeat what—"

"No, no, don't repeat anything, dear grandmamma!" interrupted Flora, rudely. "It all comes to the same thing and signifies simply that it does not matter what happens in the house provided that Frau Präsidentin Urach's conduct is not in fault! Pardon me, grandmamma; I will not offend again. The house is large enough, and one is not obliged always to cross your orbit. Ah, how I wish things were not so hard for me! Sometimes I am afraid that I shall lose patience, and—"

"Flora!" exclaimed the counselor, in a tone of entreaty and warning.

"Ah, yes, of course, Herr von* Romer! I must not forget

* *Von* is a title of nobility in Germany.

the position due to your new rank! Good heavens! how everything seems to weigh on my shoulders! But why do I merit this visitation because hearts attach themselves to me like—like burrs?"

She picked up her hat and gathered her skirts together to leave the room, but Kathe stood in her way.

"You see what happens to us unfortunate single women, my dear; if, in a weak moment, we yield to sentiment and imagine ourselves in love," she remarked to her younger sister, laying her hand playfully under her chin, "we only come to grief. Take warning by me, child, and look well that you don't follow my example!"

And before Kathe could reply, she left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOSE to the western boundary of the park stood the remains of a noble edifice, the Baumgarten Manor House. Of the grand old castle with its draw-bridge and moat nothing now remained but one turreted chamber of huge dimensions and a portion of one of the wings, for the building itself had been demolished some sixty years before. The proprietor at that time, who lived most of the year abroad, had had the Manor House rebuilt with the same blocks of granite, but in the villa style, and placed at the extreme corner of the estate, in order, as he said, "to be within sight of his fellow-beings," whenever he passed a few weeks in his own country.

But the tower and its adjacent broken-down walls had not been disturbed, and were respected as forming an attractive monument enhancing the value of the property. This tower arose on the summit of a rising piece of ground with masses of tangled brushwood growing in rich profusion around its base, while from its grand old window niches and dilapidated walls hung festoons of clustering wild roses intermixed with the wild gooseberry-tree. The creeping hop-plant clung in beautiful green contrast against the dark, time-worn stones of its portals and broken-down supports.

Up to the time of the present generation the old ruin, surrounded with its deep natural moat, had admirably answered its purpose as a landmark in the neighborhood; but when it fell into the hands of its late owner it was turned to a much more practical use. The water had been drained from the moat, and a quantity of vegetables planted in the rich soil of its bed and sides. According to the late miller, this was the most profitable return he had yet had for the money he had

spent in the purchase of this corner of the park, and the result of this new plan had so pleased him that he gave orders that the produce of this portion of the ground was to be devoted to his own personal requirements. Here it was that Kathe, who called the place the "little valley," used to wander about as a child, too young to understand the desecration that had befallen the noble old water-castle and its surroundings, and while reveling in the rich abundance of ripe wild strawberries, which grew larger and riper here than anywhere else, in happy ignorance that at any moment some sudden breach in the river embankment might overwhelm her and Susanne and the whole of the green valley around them with rushing angry floods of water.

A few days after her arrival she visited for the first time the old familiar spot, and stood gazing in bewilderment at the scene before her. The hop-plants hung leafless, not a vestige of green grass was to be seen on the rising ground, yet the April sun shone warm and bright on the massive old ruin, lighting it up in strong relief against the dark mass of fir-trees in the distant background.

Not a trace of fresh mortar could be discovered on the old walls, not one new stone could be singled out from the old ones around. Yet there was no gap or broken partition, such as Kathe so well remembered used to be there when she was a child; the only open places were the huge gaping window-frames, which were formerly closed in with planks of wood, but which now streamed with light, showing the dark inward recesses beyond. New fresh life seemed to reign all around the place—overhead, white and colored pigeons circled round and round the crown of the tower, and from beneath a group of ancient nut-trees on the south side of the old tower, two tame deer came slowly scampering over the soft sward. The little valley had quite disappeared, and in its place a broad sparkling stream flowed rapidly and peacefully along, as if man's hand had never had any power over its course.

A bridge suspended by chains was swung across the stream, at the opposite side of which lay an enormous bull-dog, with his head resting on the bank, apparently watching with keen interest the approaching figures.

"Behold Moriz's Tusculum, Kathe!" said Henriette, catching hold of her arm; "once upon a time the scene of many an act of cruelty and baronial magnificence, only a few months ago the undisputed haunt of owls and bats and some of my pigeons, but now the drawing-room, bed-chamber, and royal treasury or safe-room of the noble Counselor Herr von Romer!

Doesn't the old place look dark and shaky, and as if the very next storm of wind would blow it to the earth? yet I can assure you that it is as firm and solid as masons and builders can make it; and look there, in a room beneath that overhanging stone Moriz's servant lives, and good quarters he has too, and no mistake."

"According to taste, my dear," remarked Flora, who had accompanied the two girls. "A wonderfully original idea for a business head; don't you think so, Kathe?" she added, shrugging her shoulders with a scornful gesture as she went forward, and, walking across the little bridge, pushed the dog out of her way with a touch of her foot and landed on the other side. The rustling of her silk dress frightened the deer back into the shade of the nut-trees, and seemed to make the dog growl as he followed his tyrannical mistress till she reached the door of the castle. As she stood at the entrance to this time-honored building, her hand resting against the iron buttress, her head with its crown of golden plaits slightly thrown back over her shoulder, her rich silk dress hanging in graceful folds around her, she might have been painted as the lovely daughter of a captive emperor, about to seek her father in his turreted prison.

Involuntarily Kathe glanced from Flora's handsome, well-rounded figure to the frail being at her side, whose sharp attenuated form and pale, suffering face made her heart ache to watch. The poor girl breathed with difficulty, and her complexion was so sallow it did not require a very quick observer to note that she was weaker than usual from excessive physical pain. And yet Henriette would not acknowledge herself worse than usual the last day or two, and each time any one of the household suggested that she must be suffering, she seemed so angry and annoyed that it was generally considered it would be the kindest thing to leave her alone.

The truth was, Dr. Bruck had been suddenly called away to visit a patient at a distance, and would be "absent for several days," he had informed Flora in a note hastily written before his departure, and as he had always been able to alleviate Henriette's attacks sooner than any other doctor, she would not allow herself to be attended by even the famous court physician, Dr. von Bar, during his absence.

"I will die sooner!" she exclaimed, when urged to allow him to prescribe for her, and the energy with which she uttered this sentence so exhausted her that she was left in peace and urged no more.

For several days Kathe nursed her tenderly and gently, and

when she was able to be out in the open air again guided her faltering steps with her strong and healthy young arms—as she was doing now while leading her slowly across the hanging bridge.

How well Kathe remembered peering through the key-hole of this same iron door when she roamed about the town as a little girl! She had been told that a quantity of gunpowder was hidden in the dark cellars, which might blow up at any moment, and that ugly cruel instruments for torturing people still hung on the walls.

She had been able to discern nothing but black darkness, but nevertheless she had many a time trembled with fear when a gust of strong wind had swept a damp current of air against her face as she pressed it to the ancient lock, and if an owl flew from its hiding-place she would rush back to Susanne in vague terror that some of “those ugly things were coming out of the darkness to take hold of her.” And yet, in spite of her childish fear, the old place had a wonderful attraction and charm for the lonely little girl, for many of the happiest days of her early years were spent in roaming about under the brushwood and trees which had overgrown its walls.

Now, for the first time in her life she stood within its portals, and could not help being astonished at the wonder-working power of this rich merchant prince's gold. Outside, the tower looked as if it were an old ruin, but inside it was a superbly decorated knightly residence. A grand vaulted arch stretched from one side of the hall to the other, supported by stone buttresses of magnificent proportions. On the walls those “ugly, cruel things” still hung—weapons and helmets of rare and costly workmanship—but arranged with taste and in order, and with the slanting sun-rays glittering on their burnished steel with strange and weird effect.

Presently the two young girls slowly mounted the handsome staircase and entered a room on the upper story. Here they found Flora gracefully leaning back on the velvet cushions of an easy-chair with a lighted cigarette between her fingers, watching her brother-in-law making coffee in an elegant silver cafetière.

“Well, Kathe! what do you think of it?” exclaimed the counselor, as the girls appeared, and he waved his hand around the room to intimate that he referred to the costly new furniture.

Kathe stood still for a moment on the threshold of the door, a black veil loosely thrown over her golden-brown hair, her clear laughing eyes full of merriment, and yet with a certain

haughty glance in them that just at this moment made her look like a lineal descendant of the proud old family to whom the place had formerly belonged, ere answering, gayly:

"Romantic in the extreme, Moriz! The illusion is perfect. And down there," pointing through the open window at her left to the shimmering water beneath, "down there one might be startled at the solemn aspect of things, if one didn't know that a counselor of the present nineteenth century sat inside."

He knit his brows gloomily together and glanced uneasily at her face, but she did not notice the look as she went on:

"It was neither right nor praiseworthy to convert the old ground into a vegetable garden: I think *that*, although I loved the place very dearly in my childhood. But don't you think it a strange freak of fortune that the merchant of to-day should renew the lists deserted and neglected by the high-born knights of old?"

"You must not forget, my dear Kathe, that *I* belong now to the rank of knights," replied the counselor, in a piqued tone. "The way the old nobles conformed to the spirit of the times, and allowed their grand buildings to fall into decay and ruin, is certainly sadly to be deplored. It was a decided robbery against us who come after."

"Simpleton!—more Catholic than the pope himself!" murmured Henriette, under her breath, as she moved slowly toward a sofa on which she sat down, while Kathe mechanically shut the door, still regarding her annoyed brother-in-law with the thoughtful questioning gaze which his remark had brought into her eyes.

Kathe could remember how fond she had been of him when a child, as were all those who came under his influence. She knew that he belonged to a respectable mechanic's family, that he had been early left an orphan, and that owing to his good looks and pleasing manners, her father, the renowned banker Mangold, had taken him into his office as a junior clerk, and that a few years later he married his patron's eldest daughter Clothilda. By means of his wife, who up to the time of her death was always obedient and pliant to his wishes and had great influence over her father, he succeeded in rising step by step in the bank till he reached an office of responsibility and power, and was universally loved and respected for his unswerving kindness and graciousness to those in a subordinate position. And yet this was the man who stood moodily by the table just now with an expression of haughty defiance hovering around his handsome, well-curved mouth,

and an angry flash in his eye at the careless words of an invalid girl.

"Don't, for goodness' sake, utter treason against the ancient masters of this stronghold, dear Moriz," said Henriette, sharply, "otherwise I shall expect to see the ghost of one of them rising up before us to see how the brave and powerful present owner of the castle makes coffee, and to watch the charming lady over there smoke a cigarette; how wide he would open his eyes with astonishment!"

Flora did not stir at this malicious attack; she merely slowly removed the cigarette from between her lips, and, while she knocked the ashes away, said, in a phlegmatic tone:

"Does it distress you?"

"Me!" and the girl laughed aloud. "You know, Flora, that I never allow myself to be distressed at any of your vagaries; the world is wide, and if—"

"Nonsense! don't be bitter, little one. I asked simply because I know you breathed with difficulty to-day."

A flush passed over the thin, emaciated face, leaving it paler by contrast than before, and the tears sprung to her eyes as she replied, with an effort:

"Thank you; but you had better take care of yourself, Flora. I know that each of your fingers is longing to pitch that sickly thing out of the window; for it will discolor your pearly-white teeth as it does meerschaum, and spoil your lovely complexion. And you sacrifice your sweet beauty without mercy—what for? To prove your independence. Bah! I am sure you have more taste than to stoop to the common artifices of a would-be blue-stockings; and as there is no need for a sacrifice on your part to give up the glory of this hateful—"

"Only listen to the good opinion she has of me!" interrupted Flora, in a mocking tone, shaking her head as she addressed the counselor.

"You will make yourself ill for a week," continued Henriette, quietly, but with a ring of bitter reproach in her voice, "simply because you know who dislikes and abhors the smell of tobacco from a woman's mouth. You do it on purpose to cause a quarrel—it is your last hope of pushing things to—"

Flora half rose from her seat, and demanded, proudly:

"Well! and what then? Is it not *my* affair whether I choose to submit or rebel?"

"Far from it! Your duty is to try and please him," Henriette burst out, angrily.

"Absurd! Is the wedding-ring there yet?" asked Flora,

pointing to the third finger of her soft, white hand.* “Thank God, not yet! Besides, you have no business to interfere and to be angry about my affairs at all. But you are ill and suffering, poor child! and seem more than ever to cling to your favorite doctor, while he thinks fit to be absent for ten days or a fortnight on a pleasurable excursion, instead of attending to his patients.”

“You say that, Flora,” interposed the counselor, “because he did not explain in detail the cause of his absence. Bruck rarely speaks of his patients and their requirements,” he added, severely; “that you know. Of course, he has been called away to the sick-bed of some—”

“What, to S—g, where the most famous of the university physicians are within reach? Nonsense! Don’t indulge in any such absurd illusions, my dear Moriz. Besides, I prefer not discussing the question with you—enough!”

And stretching forth her hand, she took up one of the exquisite cups of porcelain he had just filled with fragrant coffee, and, adding cream and sugar, drank it off feverishly.

Henriette refused the cup offered her by the counselor, and moved over to the glass door leading to a balcony formed by the end columns of what had once been a handsome colonnade.

The girl opened the door, and for a moment the fresh air seemed to relieve the oppression at her chest; then she clasped her hands together and uttered an involuntary groan of pain, which brought Kathe and the counselor to her side. Even Flora rose from her recumbent position, and, flinging her cigarette into the ash-pan, said, grumblingly:

“I know very well that my harmless little indulgence will be held responsible for this; but it is not in fault at all. You ought to be in bed, Henriette, and not exposed to this keen spring air, which is killing in its effect on weak constitutions like yours. I told you not to come—warned you against going out at all; but you won’t listen to any kindly meant advice, and act as if your lungs were as strong as a trumpet. And you are just as obstinate about having medical advice—”

“Because I don’t choose to put my weak chest at the mercy of the first quack who appears,” broke in Henriette, in an exhausted but very decided tone.

“What would the poor old court physician say if he heard you?” replied Flora, laughing. “I don’t care, child—do as you like. I, too, have no liking for swallowing his mixtures;

* The Germans wear the wedding ring on the right hand.

but at least of this I am sure, that he never made the mistake of—nearly cutting a patient's throat while operating on him."

The counselor turned pale to the lips, and involuntarily raised his hand, as if he would like to press it on the lips of the slanderous girl, and oblige them to be silent. He had no power to speak; but he gazed anxiously into Kathe's face, as if to read there the effects of this unkind speech.

"You are a heartless girl," blurted out Henriette.

"I am not heartless; only brave enough to call things by their right names, even when in doing so I hurt myself most. I knew that a downfall must follow such falsely dreamed renown; it did come, only in a far more damaging way than I had feared. Besides, it is of no use to dispute public opinion; and in this case you know very well how bitterly it condemns him. But I think that all who know me will understand that I have no intention of sharing the burden of such a fall. I can not palliate or hush up things, as grandmamma would wish to do. I'll do nothing of the kind—I hate it. Nothing seems to me so ridiculous as for a woman to go on worshiping and adoring a man whom the world condemns, and who has nothing left in him to adore."

She hastily flung open the other half of the glass door, and stepped out on the balcony. She had spoken with passionate earnestness, her eyes flashing, her nostrils quivering, her whole figure trembling with the emotion within her.

"Besides, he had it in his power to make me think differently; and if he had convinced *me*, how I would have defended him by word of mouth and my pen!" she went on, twisting her slender fingers round the hanging creepers. "But he preferred answering my first and only question on the subject by an icy glance that would have become a proud Spaniard—"

"That ought to have satisfied you."

"Not at all, my dear Moriz. I think it was a good way of avoiding a direct answer. I am skeptical about glances and gestures; I expect something more tangible. However, to show you that I am not as bad as you think, I will do now what I longed to do at first, and that is ask you to *prove* to me and to the world that he is innocent—that he did his duty; you were there, Moriz!"

He started back suddenly from the threshold of the balcony as if he had been shot, and laid his hand across his brow to shield his eyes from the glare of light as he replied, in a scarcely audible tone of voice:

"You know that what you ask is not in my power to do. I am no doctor."

"That is enough, Moriz; not another word!" cried Henriette, trembling, with the color coming and going on her cheek as if she had fever. "Each attempt at defense that you make when this charmingly affectionate bride-elect appears anxious to have things put right, strikes me as weak and irresolute," and her bright burning eyes glanced with anger and hatred on her sister's beautiful face. "It is to be hoped that the cruel way you treat that man, Flora, will bring matters to an end, and pretty soon, too, or rather—and the truth may as well be spoken for once—that he will of himself withdraw his claim to your hand as you wish him to do. He will lose nothing by giving you up, you heartless girl; but, unfortunately for him, he loves you, and would rather, I believe, marry you and be unhappy all his life than give you up; he is so very blind."

"What a great pity," Flora remarked from over her shoulder.

"And for that very reason I'll do all I can to open his eyes," added Henrietta, with trembling lips and a broken voice.

The amused side glance which Flora cast on her excited and angry younger sister was fast deepening into a sarcastic curl of her mouth, when a sudden thought seemed to change the whole expression of her face. Stooping slightly forward she laid her arm round the girl's ill-grown figure, and whispered in her ear, with a sardonic smile:

"Make him happy *yourself*, little one. I won't put any opposition in your way, of that you may be quite sure!"

To what degree of petty arrogance will not a woman stoop to avenge her fancied wrongs on one of her own sex! Kathe stood near enough to the sisters to hear the hissed whisper, and although she made no remark, her eyes flashed the scorn and contempt she felt.

Flora looked up and caught the expression.

"Why, what a face you are making, child! can't you understand a bit of fun?" she said, half amused, half perplexed. "I am not doing your nursling any harm, although I have full right to put an end, if I chose, to Henriette's malicious remarks. These two people, you must know," and she pointed to the counselor and Henriette, "have taken it into their heads that they must keep watch on my morals; and you, just fresh from school, only just free yourself from rules and regulations, must needs aid and abet them against me. You are a little donkey if you think I shall care for your verdict against me!"

She laughed merrily as she finished, and leaning over the

balcony shook a branch of one of the nut-trees, causing a pigeon which had settled there to fly upward in the glistening air.

"Kathe, look at her! a moment ago she was resting on the branch by the side of her companions, but now she has spread her silver wings and mounted high above our heads, and from her proud position in the lonely heavens appears very independent to eyes looking at her from below. Perhaps you will understand something of what I mean. Apropos, Moriz," she said, suddenly interrupting herself and beckoning to him to come out again on the balcony, "Doctor Bruck's new property must lie down behind that copse, that wretched old place he has just bought; I can see smoke curling above the trees."

"Because fire is burning in the stove, I have no doubt," said the counselor, gayly; "his aunt arrived yesterday."

"What, in that neglected old place?"

"Yes. But then the late castle miller was far too sensible a landlord to let his property go to ruin. The place is in first-rate repair; not a nail is wanting to the floors, or a tile out of place on the roof."

"Hope she will enjoy it! For her the place is not so bad—her old-fashioned furniture and the picture of her deceased husband will correspond with those walls, and she will have plenty of space in which to preserve and bake to her heart's content—and there is an inexhaustible supply of water for her scouring."

And Flora shuddered and pretended to be cold, and drew around her the costly shawl which had fallen from her shoulders, and gathered her skirts from the floor, as if she had been suddenly obliged to stand in a freshly scoured room. "Let us shut the doors," she said, quitting the balcony and entering the room; "the wind brings the smoke and damp this way—Bah!" she added, waving her fine handkerchief before her face and dilating her nostrils; "I believe the good woman is cooking pancakes now, though I don't suppose she has a chair to sit down on in the house—she must always be at something in the kitchen." And so saying Flora shut the doors.

Meanwhile Henriette had left the room—Flora's whisper had shocked her terribly, and made her feel as if she had suddenly awoke from a troubled sleep to find herself on the edge of a dangerous precipice. She did not answer, but her pale cheeks grew white as marble, and presently, unnoticed by Flora, she rose from her seat and crept slowly away up to the highest garret in the tower, where only the doves and the

jackdaws had their haunt, and where the poor girl knew that she would be alone for a time.

When she was gone Kathe also took up her parasol, and moved toward the door. She felt instinctively that Henriette would like to be alone, so she did not think of following her; but the richly furnished room, with its subtle perfume of exotic flowers, and Flora's restless, capricious movements, made her long to be out in the open air, and she announced her departure by saying that she was going to pay Susanne a visit at the mill.

"But why in such a hurry?" asked the counselor; "you can see Susanne to-morrow."

"I would rather go to-day," she replied.

"Well, go, then!" he said, angrily, for he saw that she was impatient to be away. "But first look here!" He drew aside a heavy Gobelin curtain, behind which, in a deep niche in the wall, stood a new iron safe.

"That belongs to you, Kathe," he said, in a softer tone; "that is your 'Tree, little tree, each time I shake thee, shower down gold and silver on me,'" and he touched the safe caressingly. "Everything your grandfather possessed in house and lands, forest and meadows, is there represented on paper. These papers are busy as bees working day and night in your service. They are pouring streams of gold to all parts of the world, in their own quiet way. Your late grandfather, the miller, made good use of his time, as the long list of his possessions in his will amply proved—but even he had no idea of the vast amount of money their sale would realize."

"So that you, Kathe, are by a long way the richest heiress in the country; if you choose, you can have your dining-room paved with thalers on your wedding-day, like the princess in the fairy tale," exclaimed Flora, who had flung herself back in a luxurious easy-chair and was holding a book in her hand. "Great pity you have so much money, child, for I am afraid that you have not been brought up in the right way for displaying your wealth advantageously before the world."

"We must wait and see," replied the young girl, merrily. "Just now I have no right to spend one thaler of all my fortune as I like. But for the sake of the castle mill, I would give anything to be of age, and use a little of the gold there, if only for one day," and she pointed to the iron safe with a sigh. "Does it inconvenience you, fair lady?"

"My mill? no more than my young life, Moriz. But yesterday I was talking to Franz in the garden, which is large and extends so far that he is forced to leave the part down by the

road uncultivated. He was saying that he means to suggest to you to sell that bit, as it would be a splendid site for a villa, and would fetch a good price; but I think that we have no need to do any such thing, and—and I should like to let some of your men have it to build cottages on, those you know who want to be near your spinning manufactory and—”

“Make them a present of it, Kathe?”

“That I didn’t mean exactly, and you need not snub me so sarcastically, Moriz: I know I shall be accused here of having sentimental ideas and far-fetched notions! Besides, the workmen don’t ask or want charity, as Doctor Bruck says—”

“As Doctor Bruck says, indeed! Has he already become *your* oracle, Kathe?” cried Flora, springing up from her seat, dashing down her book, and fixing her eyes questioningly on her young half-sister’s face.

The earnest gaze made Kathe blush for a second; but meeting her eyes with a cold, indifferent expression shining out of her own clear, truthful orbs, Kathe went on earnestly, without noticing Flora’s interruption:

“I know the value of self-earned reward—how much dearer it is than any present—and that is why I would like the workmen to have the ground at the same price as they offered to pay you for the corner they asked for, on your property.”

“You would make a brilliant business woman, Kathe!” replied the counselor, laughing aloud. “My barren bit of land would have been a bad bargain, if it had gone at the price they offered—and the piece you would part with is rich and fertile, besides being in the heart of the property. No, no, child, however much I might feel inclined to accede to your request, my position as your guardian forbids my giving you the power, if only for one hour, of doing as you wish in this instance.”

“Then the building project must lie by for awhile,” she replied, neither angry nor annoyed at his refusal of her request; “three years hence I shall think exactly as I do now on the subject—of that I am quite convinced—and when I am of age I shall let the men have a bit of land without one farthing’s interest on their money.”

And she nodded her head with a merry gesture of defiance and left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

KATHE slowly descended the winding stairs, the upper half of which were so narrow that the phantom of one of the old

knights would scarcely have found room to pass her, even if he had cared to leave his grave and revisit the home of his ancestors.

Just above her head on the wall of the landing-place hung the arms of the old family—the right of their noble birth, the instrument for which they had fought and died, for the honor of which they gave up lands and houses, and became themselves strangers in the land of their forefathers. There it hung, disfigured and discolored, and out of sight, while the instrument which had taken its place in this hall of a newly created noble was a—modern iron safe!

She left the tower, and wandered away down to the bridge. Leaning over the parapet for a few moments, she gazed into the water, not at the shadow of the overhanging branches, but at the image of her own face, with the coils of dark-brown hair crowning the top of her small, well-shaped head. These same coils of hair she had been told she ought to put into the hands of a maid; that a young lady of her position and wealth had no need or right to keep them in order herself—to which she had replied that she had “no intention of turning into a dummy for several hours of the day,” while experienced hands plaited and twisted her hair into a fashionable style, “that, after all,” added the willful girl, as a clinching argument against Mme. Urach’s earnest entreaty for her to have a maid, “might not become me. Oh, yes! it is very pleasant to be rich; but I like to be free too.” And the old lady wisely for the time allowed the subject to drop.

Leaving the bridge, Kathe walked on, following the direction of the stream, till she reached the old wooden bridge, across which lay Susanne’s drying-ground, and, just beyond again, the picturesque old house, standing on the borders of the forest, with its irregular outline distinctly marked against the dark background of the foliage, and the river flowing almost close to the steps of the door.

It was a low, one-storied house, the roof rising like a thatched cottage from immediately above the windows, surmounted by a golden weather-cock and a massive row of chimney-pots, from one of which smoke was issuing in curling rings—a thing that had not been seen there for many a long year; for in the miller’s time the house was used as a place in which to deposit fruit, and that only in one room. The window-shutters, from one year’s end to the other, were never unfastened, till they must have adhered to the window-frames; and in the fruit season only once now and again the hall door was unlatched, in order to admit Susanne when she fetched the baskets of

apples and pears needed for the regular weekly household supply. And then it was that Kathe, as a little girl, had crept in by her side, and filled her tiny apron with the luscious fruit, frightened, while she did so, at the darkness reigning around her.

To-day, for the first time, she saw glass shining in the deep window embrasures, one or two of which were partly open, and, moved by a curiosity stronger than she had any power or wish to resist, she crossed the old bridge and went straight up to the house.

Her heart beat fast, and her breath came and went quicker than usual; for she knew that the house belonged to Dr. Bruck, and that she had no right to be wandering around it in this idle, curious way. But as soon as her feet had touched the soft grass plat, and her eyes had caught sight of the sparrows twittering on the roof, she seemed to forget every other sensation but delight and astonishment in the lively, inhabited appearance of the deserted old building.

She wandered round the sides and back of the place, peering into the rooms, looking now at a green table-cloth hung out of one window, and then at the shining cooking utensils visible through another, till she reached the west corner, and was about to continue along the front part of the house, when she started and stood still, with a hot flush of shame at her thoughtless behavior covering her face and reaching to the roots of her hair.

For, at the hall door, which divided the old-fashioned house into two parts, on the top of the steps which led down to a wide-spreading lawn, stood a lady—a refined, gentle-looking woman—whom Kathe intuitively guessed must be Dr. Bruck's aunt, the widowed mistress of the house. She was dusting a picture she held in her hand; and as Kathe drew near, she looked at the young girl with surprise depicted plainly on her face, and laid the frame on a table covered with books and pictures that stood on the doorstep at her side.

She was a very different person to the bustling, stout, somewhat vulgar woman, who cared for nothing but house-cleaning and cooking, she had imagined Dr. Bruck's aunt must be from Flora's sarcastic description of her.

Glancing at her gentle face, the timid girl hurried forward, and when she reached the lowest of the three steps, she stammered out, by way of apology for her appearance near the house:

"I played here as a child, and I have only returned from Dresden a few days—and—that is my sister."

And she pointed to the picture the lady had just placed on the table, and then burst into a merry peal of laughter at her own awkward manner of introducing herself.

The lady smiled as if amused, and, moving down the steps, held out both hands, saying:

"Then you must be Doctor Bruck's youngest future sister-in-law." A shadow flitted over her face as she added, rather bitterly: "I was not aware that there were visitors at the villa."

It was now Kathe's turn for a shadow to cross over her bright laughing eyes: was she then such a mere cipher, such a mere member of the Mangold family in Dr. Bruck's estimation, that he had not thought it worth while to mention his interview with her at the mill?

She bit her lips, and silently obeyed the lady's graceful invitation to enter the house, as, opening one of the side doors and entering the room with a dignity that charmed Kathe in spite of her momentary annoyance, she said, in a friendly tone:

"This is my private room, and my home henceforth to the end," adding, with a smile: "Perhaps you can hardly understand the feeling of perfect rest and contentment which this thought brings to me. I always lived in the country till my husband had a curacy given him in town, a year or two before his death, and although he thought it best to accept the appointment, we both regretted leaving the little parsonage where we had spent our happiest years, though our income was so small that, with all our economy and care, it was often a difficult matter to meet our simple expenses. I dislike the dust and noise of town life, and the last few years I longed so much to return to the green fields and fresh air of the country that my health began to fail. I said nothing of course to the doctor; and only a few days ago I discovered that he had spent his savings of years to satisfy this craving of mine, and bought this place. He brought me to see it in the afternoon of the day he purchased it, and never shall I forget the delight and surprise I felt when he told me that henceforth I was to live here." And her voice faltered with emotion as she turned her head aside to hide the tears in her eyes, while Kathe wondered to herself why, if she felt so deeply her nephew's kindness, she should speak of him as the "Doctor," and not call him by his name.

Presently the lady smiled again, and said, in a confiding tone as if she had known her young visitor for years:

"It's a genuine little castle, isn't it? Look at those massive folding doors and that grand stucco work on the ceiling! and

those old-fashioned leather hangings, with their blackened gold ornaments, must once have been very costly. And outside in the garden there are the remains of many valuable sandstone figures and other ornaments. I am convinced that this place was at one time the dower-house of the old Baumgarten family. I shall hunt up its history some day—but I have only had time as yet to arrange the rooms a little, and have the stoves warmed, for I fancy the walls are a little damp, otherwise the house is in perfect repair, not a window broken or a nail wanting.”

While the elder lady thus chatted on, Kathe had been quietly observing the contents of the room. The dark, well-worn mahogany furniture suited to perfection the rich, faded leather hangings. Not far from the queer-shaped voluted china stove stood the roomy sofa covered with chintz, above which hung a portrait in pastilles of the late curate in his clerical robes. A group of exquisite plants, azaleas, cactus and gum-trees occupied the space on either side of the window, and the deep embrasure itself was filled in with sweet-smelling hyacinths, delicate white narcissus and other spring flowers. On a small stand placed in the sunlight half a dozen gold and silver fish were swimming in a globe, above which hung an antiquated canary cage, suspended by a chain from a hook in the ceiling. In a niche in one side of the room, ornamented with ivy, stood a work-basket with a low chair and stool in front of it.

“Those are my pet plants. I have cultivated them entirely myself,” said the curate’s widow, following her young visitor’s surprised glance at the rich floral show in the window. “The best of them all, of course, I had placed in the doctor’s room,” she added, opening the door leading into an adjoining apartment and bidding Kathe enter. This apartment was a corner room, the best “of course” the house afforded, with the windows opening to the south and west sides.

How quietly and gently she uttered that expression, “of course!” To Kathe, young girl as she was, it was a simple revelation of the true womanly devotion and affection this childless widowed lady bestowed upon her nephew in return for his care of and affection for her. From here could be seen the most beautiful scenery in the park and neighborhood. In the distance, beyond the flowing river, the gray top of the villa was just visible, so that as the young doctor sat at his writing-table he had only to raise his eyes in order to catch a glimpse of the golden weather-cock which surmounted the house wherein dwelt the beautiful girl he hoped to make his wife. Kathe felt her cheeks burn with anger and indignation

as she thought of the sweet illusion this man was indulging in, while the beautiful object of his love, her faithless sister, was scheming night and day to find an honorable excuse in the eyes of the world to dash that illusion to the ground by withdrawing from her engagement. Did he but know it, the whisper, "Make him happy *yourself*," would have accomplished her end.

Did the warm-hearted, affectionate aunt, who stood near her while these thoughts coursed through her brain, instinctively feel that a terrible sorrow was hovering over the future of her much-loved nephew? She had received Kathe with all the confidence that her position as the youngest future sister-in-law of her nephew demanded; she had not thought it necessary to introduce herself as Dr. Bruck's aunt, but now, as she looked anxiously at the young girl's grave troubled face and remembered she had only returned to the villa a few days since, an uneasy feeling she could not account for took possession of her, and made her involuntarily remark, after a moment's pause:

"The room is not quite finished yet. I have the large photograph of the doctor's betrothed wife to hang up over there," and she pointed to a space on the wall between the window, "also an oil-painting of his mother, my dear and only sister."

Then she went on to say that she expected him to arrive in town by the evening train, that he had no idea that she had left her old apartments, but that, wishing to give him a pleasant surprise, she had persuaded the kind counselor to allow her to obtain the keys of the new house that she might have all in readiness against her nephew's return.

During this explanation the elderly lady had moved gently to and fro about the room, putting the final touches to the curtains and ornaments, as quietly as if the doctor himself were sitting at his table writing. Then, after dipping her hands in a basin of fresh water in the hall and wiping them on a clean white cloth, she went to a cupboard in the doctor's room and taking out a plate of sweet cakes offered them smilingly to Kathe, saying:

"They are quite fresh. I found time to bake them this morning after my early cup of coffee, for the doctor always likes to have some by him to give to small troublesome patients. Wine I can't offer you—the few bottles I had by me I left in town—they belong to those patients who are seriously ill and need support."

The tears sprung into Kathe's eyes as she thought of the

"papers" in the new iron safe, which could "pour streams of gold to every quarter of the world," of the well-filled wine-cellar in the tower, which Henriette had told her contained "mountains of bottles, full of rich old wine," and of her indolent sister lounging on the easy-chair smoking a cigarette of rare and fabulous value. Contrasting these things with the simple life, and habits, and speech of the kind-hearted lady before her, the young girl lost her timidity and reserve, and five minutes later was relating to this apparent stranger the history of her short eighteen years, of her home and duties in Dresden, and the busy life led by her governess as the wife of a parish doctor in the town, who had taught her young pupil to follow her example, and to minister with her own hands, not only to the wants and needs of the poor around, but to every one else who had any claim on her affection or sympathy.

"But what does Madame Urach think of such an education for you?" asked the elderly lady, smiling a soft, amused smile, as she glanced admiringly at the blooming young face by her side.

"I don't know," replied Kathe, shrugging her shoulders with a mischievous gleam in her eyes, "but I think she considers my movements too impetuous, my voice too loud, and that on the whole I am too strong and healthy, and not pale enough. No one knows how my bright spirits distress her—they are not lady-like. Is that the portrait of your sister, madame?" asked the girl, abruptly changing the conversation, and walking over to the side of the room where an oil-painting was placed against the wall.

"Yes. I shall be anxious about it till it is hung up in its place, for the frame is a little shaken, I fear; but I suffer from giddiness, and dare not venture to mount the steps to hang it up, so it must wait till the new maid arrives. I expect her this evening. I was obliged to leave the putting up of my bed-curtains for the same unfortunate reason."

In an instant Kathe's parasol and hat were laid on the table, and the nosegay of wild flowers she had gathered on the road unthinkingly placed in a crystal glass that stood by the writing materials. Giving the table a push into the middle of the room, she took up the hammer and nails lying on the window-sill and said, coaxingly:

"Let me do it!"

"What a kind, useful little woman you are," was the older lady's smiling assent to this unexpected proposal, as she pointed to a high narrow stool for Kathe to stand on.

In a very few moments the picture was in its place, and then the old lady handed her the photograph to hang up also, saying, as she gently removed a little dust from the glass:

"What a lovely face it is! I don't know her very well, I have seen her so seldom. Naturally I couldn't expect her to come and see an old woman like me very often, but she is very dear to me, since she loves the doctor and means to make him happy."

Kathe shrunk back for a moment. After all she had heard in the tower not an hour ago, how could she deliberately place before the eyes of the deceived man the portrait which no longer virtually belonged to him any more than the ring he wore on his finger? Both would soon have to be returned to the heartless girl who had played with her lover's feelings as a cat plays with a mouse, and yet Kathe dared not utter one word of the bitter truth. She felt so false and so like a hypocrite by her silence, that she all but let the picture fall to the ground as she took it out of the old lady's hand. Hitting the nail with such force that it made the old wall shake, she hastily twisted the cord over it and sprung to the ground. Involuntarily glancing at her work as she replaced the table, she fancied the beautiful mouth curled in a triumphant wicked smile of demoniacal delight.

Kathe snatched up her hat and parasol and turned to leave the room as quickly as possible. She had reached the threshold and was uttering a hasty farewell, when her eyes caught sight of an open door on her right, through which she could see the old lady's uncurtained bed with the steps beside it.

"I had forgotten that!" she exclaimed. "Please let me do it," she added, in answer to her companion's objection, and hurrying into the chamber she lifted the clean chintz curtains from the bed, and mounted the steps. She had put half the rings through the iron rail running round the head of the bedstead, when she raised her eyes and saw the tall figure of a man passing before the window. She recognized him in a moment, but ere she could make up her mind if she should remain where she was or dismount from her exalted position, he had crossed the outer hall and entered the room.

The elderly lady, who was mixing a glass of raspberry vinegar for her "useful little guest," turned round at the sound of heavy footsteps, and exclaiming:

"Leo, my boy, you here?" threw herself into the young man's arms.

Half hidden behind the partly hung curtains, Kathe witnessed the tender manner in which the doctor bent over his

aged relative, as he lifted her hand from his shoulder and kissed it reverentially. Then raising his head he glanced with pleased surprise round the room.

"Well, Leo, what do you think of my quitting town without your leave?" asked his aunt.

"I sha'n't find fault certainly, though you must have been doing a great deal too much for your strength. But you are looking well, better than when I left you in town."

"But you are not, Leo," she interrupted, anxiously. "You are not half so strong looking as you were, and here something troubles you, I am sure," and she touched his brow with her finger. "Has anything gone wrong with your patients?"

"No, aunt." He spoke distinctly and assuringly, but in a tone that admitted of no further questioning on the subject. "How pleasant the room looks," he added, walking slowly up and down the floor with his hands behind him. "The peace a refined woman's presence brings is very sweet to a hard-working man. This is why I always come back to you, aunt, and feel refreshed. I like your old-fashioned furniture and your gentle ways. I shall often stay here."

"Oh, yes, I dare say," answered the old lady, smiling archly, "until a certain day in June arrives. Your marriage is to be at Whitsuntide."

"Yes, on Whit-Monday," he replied, in a firm ringing tone of voice.

Kathe began to feel very uncomfortable. She held her breath and crouched down behind the curtains in the hope that each moment the doctor would quit the room and leave her free to descend from her exalted position unobserved and with dignity. In spite of her vexation of being thus unwillingly forced into the awkward predicament of a witness to the aunt and nephew's interview, she could not help smiling at the ridiculous figure she would cut if chance willed it that he raised his eyes in her direction, and caught sight of her foot through the rungs of the steps on which she stood. She rebelled against her enforced presence, but had not sufficient courage to boldly descend from her perch and face the surprise of the doctor. She softly drew back a corner of the curtain and anxiously watched his movements. But instead of leaving the room he stood still by the table and took up a letter addressed to him which lay on a pile of books.

The moment his aunt noticed what he was doing the color deepened in her face, and she darted forward as if to take the paper out of his hand, but changing her mind, she exclaimed:

"Ah, poor me! how forgetful I'm growing! The letter

only came an hour or two ago from that man Senz, the merchant. It was not to be given you till to-morrow. I believe it contains the payment of your salary, and at this unusual time, too, it makes me fear that—”

“Yes, he too dismisses me as his family physician,” said the young doctor, quietly throwing the letter and its inclosed check on the table. “Why do you grieve over it, aunt?”

“I? I don’t, my dear, now that I see that you don’t take the ingratitude of that man to heart. I firmly believe in you and your medical skill and—your lucky star,” she answered, in her soft, womanly voice. “The misfortune and ill-will you have to contend with just now I don’t pay any attention to. You will make your way yet, my boy; you know you will.” Then pointing to the adjoining apartment, she added: “Come and look at your room and see how snug and undisturbed you will be while you work and think. You can’t tell, Leo, how delighted I am that we are to be together for a few weeks longer, and that I shall be able to take care of you.”

“Yes, you kind old aunt; but all those small sacrifices that you have been making the last two or three months because you thought my affairs were going badly must be put a stop to. You sha’n’t trouble your dear old head again about preparing my dinner; if possible, we’ll have back our old cook. I can afford it. Look!” and he took a heavy purse from his pocket, opened it, and emptied its contents on the table.

The old lady clasped her hands together in speechless astonishment at the number of shining gold pieces on her simple table-cloth.

“That is only one single fee, aunt,” he said, with visible satisfaction. “Hard times are over, thank God!” and he turned round and left the room ere his astonished old aunt had time to ask which of his patients it was who had rewarded him with this substantial sum.

Now was the moment for Kathe to escape from her awkward position. Her heart beating, and her cheeks burning with shame at having secretly overheard the foregoing conversation, she slipped down the steps as soon as the old lady had followed her nephew, and noiselessly escaped across the hall to the steps outside. Glancing back furtively into the corner room, she saw the aunt and nephew standing by the writing-table, and heard the latter say:

“What lovely little wild flowers! How kind of you to remember how fond I am of these little blue spring flowers!”

An exclamation from the old lady made him start with surprise.

"It was not I, Leo, it was Kathe Mangold put them in the glass; she is here, and I had forgotten all about her—my poor old head!" and she hurried from the room to find her guest and apologize to her for her forgetfulness.

But Kathe had gently closed the door ere she reached the hall, and was out of sight through the copse as quickly as possible.

Presently the young girl turned, and slowly walked back to the house. When she drew near the windows she saw a firm, strong, manly hand draw the hyacinth pots slightly apart and place between them a crystal glass of blue forget-me-nots; it was her nosegay that he had evidently removed from his own table and brought in there to the dining-room.

Kathe started and blushed, for in spite of her unnoticed escape from the house she had nevertheless placed herself in an awkward position. What would he be likely to think of her, a young girl, for placing a glass of his favorite flowers on his table in his private study? Would he imagine she had gathered them on purpose?

Tears of vexation and annoyance rose to her eyes, but mastering her emotion, she said, as quietly as she could:

"Will you kindly hand me my flowers, Herr Doctor? They belong to me; I put them down for a moment on the table and forgot them;" and she raised her hands to receive the nosegay.

At first it seemed as if her unexpected voice had startled him, for he half knocked over one of the narcissus pots; but although it somewhat annoyed him to find that his action had been seen by Kathe, he replied pleasantly, in a voice that assured her that he had not meant to reprove her by removing the flowers from his room.

"I will bring them out to you, fraulein."

A moment later his flowing beard and broad shoulders appeared outside on the top of the steps, and he handed her the glass with a polite inclination of his handsome head. She took the flowers and said, smiling:

"They are bright, brave little things to come out so quickly in the April sun, but they need so much hunting after that when at last one has found a handful of them they ought to be prized higher than a basketful of hot-house flowers," and the young girl looked fearlessly up in the doctor's face, feeling convinced that he would not *now* imagine she had left them on his table as a token of their new relationship.

Then the old lady put her head out of the window and apologized for her forgetfulness of her guest in the joy of welcom-

ing her dear nephew, adding an urgent and warm entreaty for Kathe to come and see her as often as she could.

"In a few weeks Fraulein Kathe returns to Dresden," replied the doctor, quickly.

"I may remain longer, Herr Doctor; perhaps I shall stay here a few months even," she answered, wondering if he feared that she had been talking to his aunt about his peculiar position with regard to Flora; and longing to assure him that she respected his desire to keep his own affairs to himself, yet wondering again what this could have to do with her stay at the villa. "Besides," she added, after a pause, "as Henriette's physician, you will be the best judge of when she will be well enough for me to leave her and return to Dresden."

"Do you intend nursing Henriette?"

"Of course I do, and I think it a great shame that she has hitherto been nursed only by servants; she has very bad nights, and she told me herself that she would rather pass them alone than have a sleepy, disagreeable person by her side in case she needs help. That must not occur again, I shall stay with her."

"You are taking upon yourself more than you imagine, fraulein. Henriette is very ill, and will require long and patient nursing," he added, shading his eyes with his hand.

"I know that," replied Kathe, gravely, her cheeks paling. "But I have courage—"

"I don't doubt it for a moment, any more than I do your patience or your kind-heartedness; but it is not a question of conjecture as to time. I can not possibly give my consent to your accepting the post of head nurse; physically you could not endure the fatigue."

"I?" and the girl held up her arm and looked proudly at its round, plump appearance, as she smiled incredulously and said, warmly: "Don't you think your fears on that score may be set at rest, Herr Doctor? I come of a good healthy family. I take after my grandmother, who was a peasant you know, or rather a woodman's daughter; she used to go about barefoot, and could handle an ax better than her brothers. Susanne told me that."

The young man looked up at the open window, and caught his old aunt regarding his companion with a strange look of admiration shining in her eyes. His own face immediately clouded.

"It's not a question of muscular strength," he said, evasively; "as a rule it is not so necessary in a sick-room, and we must think of your nerves; however, it is not for me to deter-

mine the point of your stay. That is Moriz's affair; he is your guardian and he will decide when it is best you should return to Dresden," and the last words were uttered in a more determined tone than was usual with the pleasant-spoken doctor.

His aunt shrunk back and looked at him questioningly, but Kathe stood quite still.

"Why are you so inflexible? Why do you seem so anxious that my guardian should be hard and unyielding on this subject?" the girl asked in her musical voice. "Are you afraid I shall do harm by staying; I don't think Moriz has power over me to keep me from nursing my sister if I choose. What do you say to her going with me to Dresden? There my old friend will share the nursing with me; that won't hurt my nerves," and she smiled again.

"I will see what I can do," he replied.

"In that case I promise to fly away from here as fast and as soon as possible," replied Kathe, with a grateful expression in her eyes which made him turn away his own and remain silent.

"Are you then so very anxious to be gone?" asked the old lady, with a slight reproach ringing in the sound of her voice.

The young girl drew the gauze scarf which had fallen on her shoulders, and which she had worn instead of a hat, over her head, and tied it firmly under her chin, ere she answered, laughingly:

"Ought I to say 'no' for politeness' sake, madame? I am afraid that as things are I shall be obliged to take my place in the world and conform to its capricious usages, but I have no intention of giving up my individual freedom of thought. I am as much a stranger to the grandmother of my half-sister now as I was when dear papa made me kiss her hand as a little girl. She does not understand me at all, and I shrink away from her, and would like to hide myself in a corner as I did when a child. How cold the house seems!" and she shivered. "There is too much marble, it chills one's feet. That is why Moriz has become such a formal, stately man. Yes, dear madame, I shall be delighted to return to Dresden as soon as possible—provided Henriette goes with me, for I love her dearly; if she does *not*," and the girl dropped the bantering tone she had adopted toward the old lady—"if she is not allowed to go, then I shall do my best to remain where I am, even to running the risk of obliging Moriz to use physical force for my removal to Dresden."

With a friendly nod to his aunt and a slight bow to the doctor, she turned off on her road to visit old Susanne.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE factory clock had chimed out seven, yet Kathe was still sitting in the bow-window at the Mill-house. She had yielded to Susanne's wish, and inspected the contents of the linen-press, had listened to the old woman's complaints that she was not yet strong enough to "look after things a bit," and to her grumblings about the inspector's wife, whom she did not trust implicitly, although she was a "good, kind soul." But Kathe had not taken much interest to-day in all these things, and felt glad when Susanne had gone to bed and left her to herself in the dimly lighted room.

With her hands lying idly in her lap, and her head resting against the back of her chair, the young girl gave herself up to thinking. She was in no hurry to leave the mill; when the twilight hour was over, she would still have ample time to walk back to the villa and change her dress before joining the family circle at eight.

This twilight hour with its soft beauty and subdued hush was an unknown pleasure at the villa. There the moment the sun was down the shutters were closed, and the brilliant gas-chandeliers were lighted, and every shadow and half tint driven mercilessly away out of sight. But in Dresden how sweetly this hour was prized by all the inmates of the house, when gentle words were spoken and kindly thoughts exchanged, which gave impetus and encouragement to each for the labors of the following day.

The monotonous swaying to and fro of the pendulum of the wooden clock in the corner of the big room was dull and heavy; but it reminded the young girl of the evenings spent in the same room when she was a little child, and listened with delight and yet trembling to the fairy tales related by old Susanne as she sat spinning by the stove.

She glanced round the vast apartment, shrouded in the approaching darkness, and half shuddered as her eyes rested on the spot where her grandfather had died; and then she went on to think of the strange remarks made by the doctor when first she arrived, when she questioned him about the old man's death—unheeded by her as to its full meaning at the time, but now so well understood by the light of the knowledge that had come to her since.

Well, all the world might say to the contrary, but *she* could not and would not believe that such an earnest, truthful, up-

right man as she was convinced the doctor was would have risked the danger of performing an operation and hastening a man's death if he had not had firm faith in his own skill and experience, and the truest belief that the result of his skill would be satisfactory.

And the young girl's cheeks grew hot with anger, and her heart felt heavy with sorrow, as she recalled Flora's bitter sneers against Dr. Bruck's medical knowledge when they were sitting in the luxuriously furnished apartments in the tower.

What a very strange woman this much-admired sister must be to cut and wound to the heart's core the man she was engaged to and had promised to marry in a very few weeks! And then Kathe's thoughts wandered off to all she had heard about this same lover whom Flora pretended to despise; how he had distinguished himself in the Franco-German war by his courage, and skill, and bold daring; how, on the return of his regiment to Berlin, he had been rewarded with a post of honor and distinction, which had brought him prominently into notice as a man of mark and merit; and how, at the wish of his aunt, he had resigned this post and returned to M——. Here his brilliant services in the war, and the honors showered upon him in Berlin, had caused him to become a much-sought-after physician, and a very desirable match for the daughters of the neighboring families.

Even the proud, ambitious Flora Mangold had considered it no condescension on her part to favor him with a promise of her hand. She had openly shown a preference for his society during the first few weeks of his return to M——; and when, a little later on, her engagement to the renowned young doctor was publicly announced, she was congratulated by all her friends, and envied by all the unmarried ladies belonging to their neighborhood.

No wonder she shrunk from personally breaking her engagement now that misfortune had overtaken her lover; she feared the world's verdict on such conduct if it came to be known that she had heartlessly flung him over at the first breath of slander touching his medical skill. So she preferred secretly torturing and wounding him, till her cold indifference and scornful manner should goad him into withdrawing from all claim to her hand.

Kathe sprung up from her seat as the thought struck her that if she remained at the villa for any length of time she would have to witness the young doctor's miserable awakening from his dream of Paradise. That he loved her sister Flora devotedly and blindly she was convinced; also that he would

struggle hard to win her for his wife before acknowledging his defeat.

Kathe clinched her hands with rage as she determined henceforth to support Moriz and Henriette, and oblige Flora to keep to her word, and not allow her to betray the man to whom she had plighted her troth.

"What a fool Flora must be to throw away so much happiness!" muttered the young girl, angrily. "If she had only seen him as I did to-day, so tender and gentle to his old aunt, she would—"

But Kathe checked herself, hastily pushed aside the stool at her feet, and sprung across the dark room into the hall, where a lamp burned brightly, and the door of the work-room stood open, through which the burr of the mill-wheels and the hum of the machines could be plainly heard. The light and the noise combined to scare away the half-formed thought which had involuntarily crept into the young girl's brain and frightened her.

As she left the Mill-house and slowly walked down the stone steps, the evening air cooled her hot cheeks, and made her feel half ashamed of the manner in which she had spent the last hour in the corner room of the old Mill-house.

The stars were shining overhead, and it was quite dark when she reached the villa. Peering through one of the windows where the shutters were not quite closed, she saw that the drawing-room was full of visitors. Then suddenly she remembered that this was Mme. Urach's reception night, and, hastily running round to a side entrance for fear of being seen in the hall, she rushed up to her own room to change her dress.

It was nearly half past eight when Kathe entered one of the drawing-rooms, where Henriette sat at the tea-table, with a number of young ladies chatting and laughing about her.

"Come here, Kathe," exclaimed Henriette, as the young girl appeared; "the tea is cold, I'm afraid, but you shall have some fresh made if you like."

"No, thank you, dear," replied Kathe, looking anxiously at the pale, drawn face of the invalid girl, whose eyes were shining feverishly, and whose emaciated angular figure looked almost grotesque, by reason of the scarlet sleeveless jacket she wore over a bright blue silk dress. Her fair hair was adorned with ribbons of the same brilliant hue, and the little shoe peeping from under her skirts had attached to it a rosette of color to match her jacket.

"Doctor Bruck has come back," whispered Henriette, in a low, trembling voice, nodding her head toward the music-

room, where some one was murdering a popular valse on a grand piano; "he is not there, but in Flora's room beyond. Kathe, doesn't he look as if he had grown taller since he went away? Good gracious! Kathe, don't put on that long face!" the girl went on, excitedly. "Every one seems disagreeable to-night—Moriz is put out at the contents of a telegram he received an hour ago, and grandma is as savage as she can be because her rooms are somewhat empty this evening. Bah!—and I, I am *so* happy, so very happy! Do you know, Kathe, I was afraid, a couple of days ago, that Doctor Bruck would find me a corpse when he returned. No, no, I will *not* die, if he is not there by me."

It was well that the false notes from the adjoining room crashed louder and louder, and that the old gentlemen by the stove raised their voices in warm dispute over some political question, for Henriette had spoken in a sharp, clear tone that caused Mme. Urach to raise her eyes and look reprovingly across the tea-table. In an instant the girl recovered her usual calmness, and added quietly to Kathe, as she shrugged her shoulders and glanced round the room: "No one dies willingly alone; and if the doctor is standing by, well! one always fancies up to the last moment, I suppose, that one will recover. Won't you drink this, Kathe?"

"I can't," was all the answer Kathe could utter. She knew now quite well that Henriette would never go to Dresden, and with nervous, trembling fingers she pulled a piece of embroidery out of her pocket, and tried to make it appear to those around that she meant to work.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Henriette, impatiently. "Do you imagine I am going to sit here and watch you drag your needle in and out that bit of embroidery? Come, let us go to the music-room! Margaret von Grise will destroy our nerves as well as the instrument, unless we put an end to that noise;" and she wound her thin arms round Kathe's waist, and drew her into the adjoining apartment.

The wide folding doors between this room and Flora's private sanctum beyond were thrown open to-night, as was usually the case on Mme. Urach's reception evenings. Flora was standing idly by the table, her brother-in-law lounging in a *fauteuil*, and Dr. Bruck turning over the leaves of a book, when the two girls appeared on the threshold. The doctor looked pale in spite of the subdued, soft light from the lamp, which was not half so bright as the gas in the adjoining salons, and his face was overshadowed by an earnest, grave expression about the brow and mouth which betokened a spirit ill at ease.

within; but in spite of his gravity he looked remarkably young by the side of his handsome betrothed bride.

Seeing the lovers were not alone, Henriette walked unconcernedly into the room, but Kathe stood hesitating on the threshold. Flora's forbidding countenance awed her. She noticed, by a glance at the lovely face before her, that her sister was not in a pleasant humor, and was about to return to the music-room, when Flora said, without changing her position at the table: "Come here, child!" then as her eye caught sight of the gray silk dress, which Kathe had exchanged for the usual heavy mourning she wore, she added: "Always that stiff silk which makes you look like the paper figure of an angel, and is enough to try the nerves of the strongest with its constant rustling and crackling. For goodness' sake tell us why you always wear such thick, heavy material, which must be as fit for your simple domestic life in Dresden as—"

"It's a weakness of mine," interrupted Kathe, with an unruffled smile, "I dare say you will think it very childish, but I love to hear silk rustling about me, it sounds so grand. Of course I don't wear it in my busy or domestic hours in Dresden; you know that well, Flora."

"Only hear how proudly she emphasizes the word 'domestic!' You little goose—I should like to see you just once in your linen apron giving out the stores. Ah, well! Every one has his or her hobby! To be domestic—is not mine," and she looked slowly into the young doctor's face, who closed his book, and laid it on the table.

"What nonsense, Flora!" cried Henriette, in her shrill, mocking voice; "a few months ago you were often enough over at the soup kitchen, as interested as any one in making the soup, or pretending to be—any way, the dainty linen apron and your wonderful exertions became you perfectly—ha! ha!"

Flora bit her lip.

"As usual, you are exaggerating; and this time you have represented that fancy of mine as an earnest act, whereas it was only a passing caprice," replied Flora, as she slowly began pacing to and fro on the floor, fully aware that the white alpaca folds of her dress showed off to advantage the supple grace of her figure.

The counselor sprung up.

"Will it please you to come into the other room now?" he asked. "There are very few people here to-night, and no wonder—there is a *soirée* at the duke's this evening," he added, as if to reassure himself. "But unless we make up our

minds to a day or two's bad humor from grandmamma, we had better go and make ourselves agreeable. Come, Flora."

"I have excused myself for half an hour, Moriz," she replied, with impatience. "My article must be finished to-night, and it would have been done already if Doctor Bruck had not, unfortunately, detained me."

"Is there so much hurry needed? Why, may I ask?" spoke the doctor, drawing near the writing-table with his eyes brimful of fun.

"Why? Because I gave my word it should be done to-night," she answered, sharply. "Ah, it amuses you, I see. I suppose, as it is only a *woman's* work, you are wondering who in all the world is waiting for such a trifle?"

"In general, I *don't* think so lightly of woman's work—"

"In general?" she repeated, with a hard laugh. "Ah, yes, to be sure, in general woman's work consists in cooking, sewing, knitting—"

"Why don't you allow me to finish, Flora?" he went on, patiently. "I was referring to woman's moral influence as well as to the work of her hands. I have not gone very much into the question of women's rights, but I maintain that she is capable of being a true helpmeet and assistant to man in all his undertakings, be the undertakings of what nature they may."

"Assistant? How condescending! My dear friend, we women want more than that. We claim *equality*, and freedom to pursue whatever aim or purpose we may have in view."

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating air as he answered in a slightly sarcastic tone:

"That is the highest and wildest power modern advancement can claim, but one which will be disputed by all those who have no wish to see women placed in a false position. It would be like putting a sharp knife into a small careless hand."

Flora did not reply, but her face had become very white. She pointedly took up a steel pen lying on the table, tried its nib on her thumb-nail, and stuck it in a pen-holder; then she drew toward her a small ebony case, and with a rash but trembling hand opened it and drew forth a cigarette. Henriette snatched her hand from Kathe's arm and stepped forward as if to remonstrate with her willful elder sister. The counselor walked hastily across the room, as the small tapering fingers opened a small knife, and, with a defiant glance over her shoulder at the doctor, Flora sniffed off the end bit, saying:

"The knife to be used for this purpose, eh? But there is

one thing that our poor woman's brain shares in common with you men, and that is, that we can think and work far better than we—smoke," and she struck a match and lighted the cigarette.

"You smoking, Flora? Why, I thought a cigar always made you feel ill!" exclaimed Margaret Grise, entering just at this moment and clapping her hands together.

"Flora is only doing it for fun," remarked Dr. Bruck, quietly nearing the table where his betrothed was standing. "This first attempt will be enough for her, a second would be injurious to her health."

"Will you dare forbid it, Leo?" asked Flora, in an icy tone, but with flashing eyes, as for a moment she took the cigarette from her lips and held it daintily between her fingers.

Without any haste, and in a gentle but firm manner, the young man took the obnoxious weed from her hand and threw it among the ashes of the stove.

"I have no right as yet to forbid it. I might beg you not to do it, but I have no liking for useless requests. You know very well I hate to see smoke issuing from a woman's lips. In my capacity as physician I absolutely forbid you to smoke. I have told you before your lungs are not too strong."

At first Flora looked at her lover in speechless astonishment at his boldness, but when he made reference to her lungs she shuddered slightly, but quickly rallying, she said, with a mocking laugh:

"That is a very far-fetched diagnosis. Besides, that horrid old court physician, who has known me since my childhood, has never hinted at such a thing. You try to frighten me as if I were a baby. Bah! Life is not such a delightful thing to me that I care to give up one pleasure to prolong it. On the contrary, I mean to continue to smoke—it is necessary for me in my literary vocation, and this vocation is my only happiness—for it I live and breathe—"

"Till you arrive at the inevitable turning-point to which your vocation is leading," broke in the doctor, in a severe tone.

An angry flush passed over her brow. She opened her lips to make a bitter retort, but noticing Fraulein Grise's presence in the room she wisely refrained. Having no desire that this scandal-loving young lady with the sharp face and angular shoulders should repeat at the court, where she was one of the *dames d'honneur*, the disagreeable fact that the proud Flora Mangold had stooped to quarrel with her lover, she forced her lips to smile, and in her usual graceful manner, answered, languidly:

"What nonsense, Leo! You are prosy to-night. You have just returned from a pleasure-trip; did you amuse your—"

She became suddenly silent, for the doctor had seized her left hand and held it in a vise.

"Will you have the kindness not to make fun of *my* vocation, Flora?" he said, laying a stress on each word.

"I was speaking of pleasure," she answered, flippantly, snatching her hand angrily away.

It was never an agreeable sight to Kathe when Mme. Urach's unsympathetic face appeared unexpectedly in her vicinity, but just now she felt a positive relief when she saw the old lady suddenly enter the room. Her countenance bore traces of vexation and annoyance, and her whole figure shook with suppressed anger as she said:

"I shall be obliged to have my whist-table brought in here if my guests are to be neglected in this way. Henriette, what made you leave the tea-table so soon? I shall have to place my maid there; *she* will not desert her post before her duty is finished. And as to you, Flora, I am surprised to find you at your writing-table when you know our friends are here. And if your publisher hurries you so much that you are obliged to work in the evening, then be good enough to close your door unless you wish us to understand that the whole thing is only done from ostentation and a love of appearing learned."

The old lady must have been very irate indeed to speak thus before one of the ladies of the court.

Flora opened her papers and arranged her pens.

"You may think as you please, grandmamma!" she said, coldly. "I can not help it if others come and disturb me; but for the interruption I should have been making a sacrifice of myself at the present moment, and be sitting at one of your green tables."

Henriette slipped unnoticed past her grandmother, and winking to Kathe to follow, whispered as they left the room:

"These scenes are killing me fast."

"Have patience! Flora will have to give way; he will force her to obey him yet," replied Kathe, strongly excited. "But I can't understand *him*. Were I in his place—" she did not finish, but drew herself up proudly as her eyes flashed scornfully.

"But you don't understand the force of love, Kathe. I can see by your cool looks and blooming face that you have not yet tasted of the poisonous cup." Then after a moment's pause to regain her breath, she went on slowly and thoughtfully.

“You have no idea how fascinating and charming Flora can be if she chooses. You have only seen her since she has been playing this detestably mean rôle. I can quite understand that the man whom she once convinced she loved would die sooner than give her up.”

CHAPTER IX.

HENRIETTE went back to her place at the tea-urn, but Kathe remained standing by the piano in the music-room thinking over what she had just heard. Could it be possible that a man would die rather than give up a girl who scorned his love? And was Dr. Bruck a man likely to commit such a folly?

She could not help noticing him closely as he passed through the room with Mme. Urach and stopped to exchange a few words with a newly arrived guest. His manner was quiet and courteous as usual, but Kathe had seen his eyes flash with anger once or twice while he was talking to Flora, and even now there was a disturbed, troubled look about his brow which denoted a more restless spirit within than appeared outwardly.

Five minutes later Flora pushed back her stool with an impatient sigh, and stood on the threshold of the door between the two rooms.

“Have you finished already?” asked Fraulein von Grise running her fingers over the keys of the piano.

“How absurd to imagine any such thing! Do you fancy ideas can be struck off at that rate? The fact is I am tired—and I never can work unless the spirit is on me—I love it too well.”

Fraulein von Grise smiled a wicked smile as she remarked:

“I am getting very impatient to see what the critics say to your work on ‘Woman.’ You have told us so much about it that I am dying to see it in print. Has the publisher accepted it?”

Flora caught the wicked smile and replied:

“You would be highly delighted if it were a failure, wouldn’t you, Margaret? Well, it won’t be, as I know from my—my little finger.” She smiled softly, shook her head and advanced toward the drawing-room with the mien and air of a princess.

“What are you looking at that music for, Kathe? Can it be possible you want us to hear you play also?” she asked, standing still by her sister and glancing with a meaning expression toward the young lady at the piano. “Do you sing?”

If so, you must inherit the gift from the Sommerses; none of our family have any musical talent."

Kathe shook her head.

"At all events, Kathe, you must play," said the counselor, coming forward from a recess where he had been conversing with a friend. "I know you do, from the bills for your lessons. Frightfully dear ones too, as I have often meant to tell you."

The young girl laughed.

"They were the best, Moriz. In Dresden people are very practical, and know that the best are the cheapest in the end."

"All right, my dear. But have you any taste for music?" he asked, doubtfully. "Flora says truly the Mangolds are not musical."

"I am fond of it," she answered, simply.

"But have you any talent for it?"

"I can compose a melody some times," she replied, blushing.

Flora turned back suddenly to her sister's side, saying hastily:

"Compose melodies! What nonsense you talk, with your rosy cheeks and fondness for housewifery. A polka, perhaps, if you dance with spirit—"

"I delight in dancing, Flora," broke in Kathe, with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"Ah! But you ought not to confound that kind of music with higher works: it would require a profound study of thorough bass. I don't suppose you have learned that?" she added with a slight sneer.

"The last three years I have."

Flora clasped her hands together in despair.

"Your Lucas"—so she always spoke of the lady who educated Kathe—"your Lucas must be mad to waste money like that."

No one spoke in answer to this remark, every word of which must have been heard in the adjoining room where Dr. Bruck sat silently by the side of Henriette, glancing now and again at the group by the piano.

Henriette moved quickly from her seat, and hurrying into the music-room, said, in her shrill, clear voice:

"You are fond of music, Kathe, and you have not once touched the piano since you have been here?"

"The instrument stands close to Flora's room; how could I have found courage to disturb her at her work?" replied the young girl simply. "I have over and over again longed to

play on this piano, it has such a glorious tone, and mine in Dresden is not good for much. We bought it second-handed five years ago. My dear old friend often spoke of asking you to give me a new one, Moriz," she added, addressing her guardian; "but I dissuaded her from making the request, I was so afraid you might refuse. But since you showed me that new iron safe to-day I have lost my shyness, and certainly should like to have a piano like this one."

"That one cost a thousand thalers—a thousand thalers is a great deal to give for a girl's passing fancy. I must think over it first."

"Who plays on your instrument?" asked Kathe, with trembling voice and glowing eyes. "Who ever touches it in private life? It is only there for the use of your guests, Moriz. Must money never be spent unless for show?"

The counselor drew near and took hold of her hand; he had no idea the girl possessed so much energy and decision of character.

"Don't excite yourself, child," he said, soothingly; "am I such a very hard and grim guardian? Go and play to us—and let me hear if you really *do* care for music; prove this, and you shall have a piano to your own taste."

"After that I don't care to play," she replied, quietly drawing away her hand. "I could not perform to gain a piano—for how can I tell what *you* consider 'real love for music.' However, I will fetch my notes and let you hear me; I hate to be asked twice."

She turned to leave the room.

"Why fetch notes? Let us hear one of your own compositions," remarked Flora, scornfully.

"Even that I can't do by heart," answered Kathe, closing the door.

She soon returned with a music-case in her hand. While she seated herself at the instrument, Flora opened the case, and taking out a piece of music, cast her eyes over the title-page and asked:

"Who is it by?"

"Didn't you wish to hear one of my own compositions?"

"Yes, of course; but this piece is printed."

"Certainly, it is printed."

"Why, how did that happen?" exclaimed Flora, in undisguised astonishment.

"How does *your* work happen to be printed?" retorted Kathe, laughing, looking up gayly in her sister's face. Then seeing the cloud of displeasure that spread over Flora's counte-

nance, she hastened to add, with a proud smile: "My master had the 'Phantasie' printed to give me a birthday pleasure."

"Aha! of course that explains it," said Flora, laying the piece down on the piano.

Henriette went close behind her young sister, and leaning over her shoulder when she had arranged the piece on the stand before her, pointed to the title-page, and said, distinctly:

"Don't you be imposed on, Flora! Look here: there stands the celebrated publisher's name, Schott & Son; they don't publish music to give a girl a birthday pleasure. Kathe, tell us the truth—your things are sold and played by the public?"

Kathe nodded and blushed.

"But what I said just now is true. I had no idea my work was being printed till I saw a copy of it on my birthday table," she said, and began to play.

It was a very simple melody which presently fell in soft sweet tones on the ears of the whist-players, forcing them to involuntarily lay down their cards and listen. Those in the music-room gazed in wonder and astonishment at the girl sitting so quietly on the stool at the instrument, that the jet ornament on her bosom barely moved as she breathed. There was no brilliant display of execution, no crashing and noise, no jumbling together of notes; no one asked himself if the style were correct, but as the exquisite melody went on, now moving the heart to tears with its pathos and subdued sweetness, anon stirring the pulse to excitement with the growing wildness and grandeur of its own intensity, every one felt unconsciously lifted as it were out of himself till in one long wail of sweet-sounding chords the melody finally died away. Then for several minutes a profound silence reigned in the room, in fear that the retreating spirit of the melody might be startled by a whisper. The first to recover her powers of speech was Fraulein von Grise, who said, patronizingly:

"The princess ought to hear your charming 'Phantasie,' fraulein; if you will lend it me, I will play it to her."

"And you shall have the best pianoforte that money can buy, Kathe," said the counselor, her guardian, looking toward his ward with an air of glowing satisfaction and delight visible on his handsome countenance.

When the gentlemen had thanked her, and the elderly ladies had expressed aloud their regret that "her dear father was not alive to hear such beautiful music from his youngest born," Henriette laid her pale sharp face caressingly against Kathe's burning cheeks, and whispered, with the tears in her eyes:

"You dear darling, how proud I am of you!"

Flora was the only one who had not spoken; when first the beautiful melody began, she had noiselessly returned to her own room, and softly paced the floor till it was finished, every now and then, when some tone of richer sweetness fell on her ear, glancing through the door in startled wonder at the young girl sitting at the piano. When Kathe rose from her seat, Flora disappeared into the shadow of the deep window recess.

"I fancy Flora is vexed that she is no longer the only celebrity in the Mangold family; she has gone away to hide her—her mortification," remarked Fraulein von Grise, in a loud whisper half to herself, half to the counselor.

The counselor smiled; he always did smile if any one from the court favored him with a confidential remark, but he did not answer. Turning to Kathe he said in an injured tone:

"I am very angry with your 'dear Lucas,' as Flora calls Madame Lucas, that she never gave me a hint of your wonderful musical talents."

Kathe smiled, and answered after a moment:

"At home in Dresden no one thought of praising it to outsiders. Why should they? Madame Lucas is a woman who would never make a boast respecting her own pupil, and she knows I have to learn a great deal more yet."

"But I look upon such reticence at Spartan-like in its—"

"Perhaps the most studied mode of securing a startling scene that could possibly be devised," broke in Flora from the threshold of her door, adding, with a bitter ring in her musical voice: "You can't impose on me, Kathe, and make me believe you have a poor opinion of your own gift, or that you are not aware of its importance. I think it was very false and mean of you to be here in the house for ten days and more and pretend you did not know a note; it was not fair to me—to any of us."

"Is that your opinion, Flora?" cried Henriette, angrily. "You say that because you yourself are always talking of what you are doing—always making a fuss about the hours you spend in writing, and trying to make your friends believe in the results which never come, and—"

"Henriette, I should like a cup of tea," called out Mme. Urach, to put an end, if possible, to the angry altercation.

Henriette instantly obeyed the behest.

"You are mistaken, Flora, if you think I am not glad that I have talent for music," said Kathe, gently, trying not to further irritate by her tone of voice her proud half-sister, who was gazing at Henriette's retreating figure with glaring eyes and curling lip. "I am very glad, and it would be ungrateful of

me not to acknowledge it, it gives me so much pleasure. I ought to have spoken about it directly I came, especially as the reason I arrived a month sooner than you expected me was simply because my harmony master was obliged to leave Dresden some weeks before the long holidays commenced; and as I would like to be back when he returns home, I hurried off here directly he had gone."

At this moment Fraulein von Grise was obliged to quit the room to speak with her father, who had just arrived and asked for his daughter. The counselor followed her, to pay his respects to the old colonel.

When they were alone, Flora went over to the piano, took up the piece of music Kathe had been playing, and examined the title-page. Kathe noticed that her hand trembled, that her bosom heaved, and that she seemed very nervous, as she pointed to the colored page, and asked:

"I suppose you have been greatly complimented on this?"

"By whom?" returned Kathe. "My master is as reticent with his praise as Madame Lucas, and no one else knows it is by me. You see the composer's name is not there."

"I conclude the thing sells well?"

Kathe was silent.

"Speak out the truth. Has more than one edition appeared?"

"Well—yes."

Flora flung the piece on the piano.

"That renown and fame should come to a fat, apple-cheeked girl in her teens, while others struggle and fight for it for years—often even die before they are known—is hard!" she said, bitterly, as she began again to pace the floor. "But what does it matter in reality?" she said, suddenly standing still, and her face brightening. "The most brilliant rocket leaves no trace in the air after its explosion—a few bright sparks, and it is finished and done with, while the hidden fire in Vesuvius is growing hotter and hotter. The world knows the fire is there, and when flames burst forth at last, then it is that men's hearts tremble and shake. Very well, so it is. *Two* of our family have stepped forth now into the arena of publicity. We will wait and see, Kathe, which of us two will succeed best."

"Certainly not I," exclaimed Kathe, merrily, pushing back a stray curl from her brow. "I have no wish or desire to enter such an arena. Not that I am insensible to the delights of success; I can imagine nothing more enjoyable than the power of moving others' hearts at will by the sheer force of

one's own talents—that I would not give up for all the world—but to live *for* and *only* fame? No, no; there is far too much happiness to be gained without it in private life. What would be the use of fame to me, if it left me alone?"

"Ha, ha! that's the secret of your homely bringing up, the quintessence of your education! As your Lucas did, so will you—you intend to marry."

Flora laughed a mocking, hollow laugh that added spite to her remark.

Henriette blushed to the roots of her hair; even her throat partook of the same crimson hue, as she replied, indignantly, in a low voice:

"You sneer at marriage as though you had never thought of marrying yourself—yet—"

Flora stretched out her hand to check the coming words.

"Not a syllable more, please," she said, entreatingly. Then, as she laid her hand across her bosom and shook her head, she went on: "Yes, my dear, I was foolish and blind enough once to be caught in the net; but, thank God, my head is not entangled in its meshes, and will be able to give me back my freedom."

"Have you any conscience at all, Flora?"

"A very sensitive one, my dear, which reproaches me again and again for allowing myself to be caught as I was. I suppose you have read your Bible enough to know that we shall each have to answer for the use we make of our talents. Look at me, Kathe, and then say if you really believe I am likely to pass my life as the wife of a simple doctor, poring over the soup-kettle and knitting stockings from morning till night? And for *him* too?"

She moved her head in the direction of the tea-room, where Dr. Bruck sat all alone at the table, with a journal in his hand, evidently so occupied with his own thoughts that he had not even noticed Henriette's departure from her post at the tea-urn. Groups of ladies and gentlemen were scattered through the handsomely furnished rooms, chatting and laughing to each other; only the young doctor sat apart and alone.

"Do you see, not one of the gentlemen take any notice of him," said Flora, lowering her voice. "They avoid him, and rightly too. He has deceived both me and the world. The brilliant reputation he made was a mere sham!"

With which remark she retired to her own study, to avoid meeting Colonel von Grise, who was coming toward the music-room, accompanied by his daughter and the counselor.

After a formal introduction to Kathe, and a few compli-

mentary speeches on her charming musical talent, the old gentleman begged the young girl to favor him with a little more music.

Simply and willingly Kathe obeyed his request immediately, this time choosing one of Chopin's exquisite productions in preference to anything of her own.

As she raised her eyes from her notes at its conclusion, she was rather startled at the earnest, passionate expression of her guardian's face as he gazed at her. Never before had she noticed him looking at her like that. It was not the same kind, affectionate look with which he had given her bonbons as a child, or the bouquet he had brought with him from town only yesterday.

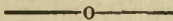
When she rose from the piano, he took one of her hands in his, and passed his arm around her waist.

"What has come over you, Kathe?" he whispered, with an earnestness of tone she had never heard before when he addressed her. "You remind me strangely of Clotilde; but you are more lovely and more gifted!"

She put her hand to her side to remove his arm; but he seized that hand also, and held it in a vise as if he would never willingly let it go again.

To the friends loitering around, it was a very simple action that the guardian should thus caress his ward in token of his delight at the display of her musical powers; but Kathe did not like it, and passively submitted simply because the look and action together had half frightened her.

Henriette's pale cheeks colored deeply; she smiled a contented, peculiar smile, and did not answer as Dr. Bruck rose silently, shook hands with her, and disappeared from the room, while every one else was occupied with Kathe and her wonderful playing.



PART II.



CHAPTER I.

SINCE the memorable evening of Kathe's *début* as a pianist a week had come and gone; "a week of terrible fatigue," old Mme. Urach remarked with a sigh as she rang for her maid and began finding fault with a dress she was to wear in the evening. The train was too short, the lace not wide enough, the sleeves too full, etc. Several grand evening parties had

been given by some of their friends high in office, and what with afternoon coffee drinkings, one or two dinners, and an entertainment at the palace, in which Flora was to recite some verses of her own illustrative of a *tableau vivant*, "they had hardly time to breathe."

Henriette was too weak and too ill to join in the gayety, and Kathe remained at home with her, refusing every entreaty to go out, though often warmly invited and strongly urged by Mme. Urach to do so.

The two young girls drank tea together in the cozy music-room, and Kathe exerted all her powers to try and amuse the invalid and distract her thoughts from the festivities her soul longed for.

"I love society, Kathe," she would say, plaintively, when the carriage had rolled away with madame and Flora and the two were left alone. "I feel wretched without it, and I think it hard sometimes that I am ill and misshapen. Grandmanima has thought me to like excitement and the pomp and show of rank and wealth; it is hard, Kathe, very hard, that I am debarred from enjoying it just now, though I hate and despise the humbug and falseness of society more than I can tell you." Then her mood would change and she would say coaxingly: "Go and play for me, Kathe dear; your music makes me feel happier, and I am a wretch to grumble at my hard lot when you are so kind and good to me."

And Kathe would go to the piano, and play everything she could think of to amuse and interest her suffering invalid sister, and remove from her mind the depressing effects of the contrast between her own weak state and plain appearance, and Flora's brilliant beauty.

One morning, a few days after the counselor's departure for Berlin on business, a superb bouquet of hot-house flowers arrived for each of the sisters. When the lid of the box was opened and the contents distributed according to the name attached to each nosegay, old Mme. Urach frowned ominously. For Henriette and Flora the counselor had chosen beautiful camellias and sweet-smelling violets, but for Kathe a daintily arranged mixture of orange-flowers and myrtle.*

At first the old lady gave no heed to the peculiar distinction of flowers between Kathe's bouquet and those of her sisters, but when Flora, who was present when the box arrived, laughingly pointed out the significance of the gift to the youngest,

* In Germany myrtle is significant of love and marriage.

then it was that Mme. Urach frowned ominously and looked very displeased.

"Really, grandmamma, you surely can not imagine that after the huge sums of money Moriz has spent to be ennobled he would remain a widower, and let his name die out?" cried Flora, with aggravating coolness. "He is comparatively young, is handsome, rich and—noble! Kathe won't refuse him, that I know for certain."

In the meantime Kathe had carried off her bouquet, untied the wire around the flowers, sprinkled them with fresh water, and placed them on the work-table in her room, without being in the least conscious of their significant import, and innocent of any other sentiment about them but pure pleasure at the kind thoughtfulness of her absent guardian in sending to her, and each of his sisters, so pretty a present. But old Mme. Urach was very miserable. A phantom had arisen to haunt the villa, whose presence she would have banished if she could, but it seemed to follow her everywhere, to wander through the costly furnished rooms, to creep into the shadows of the massive bronze ornaments, to glide over the rare porcelain cups and vases, each of which had been bought with rolls of bank-notes, and was the envy of all her friends; even to hover around the back of her favorite seat in the winter garden and imbitter the pleasure of all she cared for in life. What was to be done? The old lady considered the question as if she were forty instead of seventy and had half a life-time before her. The counselor had no *right* to marry again; she would forbid it, and he would have to obey. Did he not owe everything he possessed to her? It was through her that he had risen in the world, through her influence and by her connections that he had obtained his present enviable position in society. Had she not superintended the furnishing of the villa, and by her exquisite taste so arranged everything that the place had been converted into so well-appointed a residence that even the court circle visited there with pleasure? Besides, had it not been a great sacrifice on her part when she consented to head his establishment and give tone and refinement to his somewhat plebeian household? And now that she had succeeded to her heart's content in all that she had undertaken to do, was she to be ruthlessly displaced from the head of his household by a young second wife who would consider all these magnificent apartments as belonging to her, perhaps even apportion to "grandmamma" the use of one or two rooms as a great favor? No, no, it should not be; not even Flora, the haughty daughter of her only child, would she willingly see

placed in the position she herself had held so many years; how much less then the granddaughter of the old miller, Flora's step-sister! The girl should go back to Dresden as soon as possible; that would be the first and wisest step to take to avoid such a calamity befalling her, and then the old lady told herself "all would be well again."

The next opportunity Mme. Urach had of a little conversation with Kathe she drew the girl on to speak of her home in Dresden, expressed great admiration at her beautiful playing, and lamented in strong terms the harm so many weeks' idleness would do just now at her age. She even hinted that for the sake of not losing time she herself would accompany Kathe back to Dresden shortly, and arrange for extra lessons from some celebrated foreign professor who had just arrived in that town.

Kathe made no answer to this sudden show of interest in her music from the old lady. She determined to remain on at the villa till Dr. Bruck had given his consent to Henriette returning home with her. As yet he had said nothing, perhaps because his patient seemed daily to grow more weak and excitable. Every morning he called to see her at the same hour. Each of the girls had a small sitting-room to herself adjoining one the other, with a communicating door between, and Kathe could hear him talking brightly to Henriette, sometimes breaking forth into a hearty merry laugh that was catching in its influence, and made the young girl long to go in and join in the merriment. Dr. Bruck in Henriette's sitting-room was quite a different man to the grave, thoughtful personage he appeared to be in the drawing-room in the evening.

It pleased and delighted Kathe always to hear him laugh, but she rarely spoke to him herself, never joined in the conversation through her open door, though she could see him walking up and down the room as she sat at her table, working or reading. She had remarked more than once that Henriette always retired to her own sitting-room as the hour drew near for the daily medical visit, and that it seemed to vex and irritate her if she were followed.

The person Kathe chiefly conversed with at this time was Dr. Bruck's aunt, the curate's widow, whom she constantly met in Susanne's room when she went to pay the old house-keeper her evening visit. From her Kathe learned that she had taken charge of her sister's orphan boy from the time he was eight years old; and that ever since he had been as dear to her as a child, and the sun and joy of her life.

Kathe made it a rule always to accompany the old lady to her home—guiding her steps carefully along the river-side, till they reached the rustic bridge, where the light burning in the old-fashioned porch shone broad and clear, and made the few yards to the house, however dark it was around, clear and safe for the most timid walker. Kathe used to wait and watch the widow go up the path and enter the porch, and sometimes she would linger on the bridge till she heard the doctor's manly voice call out from his room, as he sprung forward to meet her: "Is that you, aunt?" Then she would speed away out of the lamp-light, and rush along the avenue so quickly that she would have to stop and grow cool and regain her breath before entering the villa, with the unconcerned manner and bearing befitting her appearance after a visit to old Susanne at the Mill-house.

The counselor had been gone a week or ten days, when the news came that he had sold his factory. It had been communicated by letter to Mme. Urach, who was so overpowered with joy that she put aside her dignity and went straight to Henriette's room in her dressing-gown, where she knew the three girls would most likely be together. Sitting down in the nearest arm-chair, she said:

"Thank God, my dears, Moriz has got rid of that factory! and on such brilliant terms, too, that he says he is quite astonished at his own good fortune;" and she laid her still beautiful hand on the table and looked around with a very contented smile hovering over her lips. "He has by this means put an end to his business affairs, and of course can now turn his back on those horrid men he was obliged to associate with in business. Good gracious! when I think of the people we have had to dinner sometimes it would have been more becoming if they had dined in the kitchen. Ah, my dears, what agony I have gone through with them!—but it is all over now, all over, and I am very thankful."

Kathe was standing at the window from whence the factory could be seen, with its huge yard and overlapping chimney.

"Look here, madame!" the girl suddenly exclaimed; "the yard is full of men and women, and even children—what can they mean?" and she pointed to the distant factory, in front of which numbers of men and women were assembled, talking and gesticulating in the wildest manner.

"They have heard the news, that is what it is," replied the old lady, smiling and drawing toward the window. "The coachman informed me when he came up just now that there is great excitement down there—the hands are furious, because

the establishment has been bought by a company of Jews; the workmen will reap now what they have sown. Moriz closed with this offer very suddenly, though he had an affection for the factory that I never could understand; still, as he has lately had bothers with the men, he has consented to throw it up entirely, and quite right, too."

"I don't agree with you, grandmamma; it will look as if he feared for his own power over the men," remarked Flora, with curling lip; "if I had been he I would not have sold the place just now for millions. The fellows should have been made to understand that their grumblings and demands were useless. My blood boils as I think that it will now be said that those threatening letters to me were the cause of this sale."

"Don't distress yourself, Flora! No one will impute the sale to your influence—they all know the courage, the soldier's courage and confidence you possess; one can see it flashing in your face a hundred yards off!" said Henriette, mockingly.

Flora took no notice of this malicious remark; she rarely allowed herself to be annoyed with anything Henriette said lately. She smiled now as she repressed a yawn, and moved toward the door. Mme. Urach also rose to dress for the early dinner, but turned when she reached the threshold of the door, to say: "Doctor Bruck thinks a little fresh air will do you good to-day, Kathe—he says you must go out."

"Yes, I know, and I am going as far as the forest, to smell the fresh resin from the fir-trees—I long to breathe the pure forest air."

"Then I will invite myself to go with you," said Flora. "I also want air—air, to enable me to bear the burden of adverse circumstances."

She offered her arm to her grandmother with a queenly air to help her upstairs, and both ladies left the room.

Henriette stamped her foot with rage as the door closed, and refrained from a fit of tears with the greatest difficulty at being thus forced into having her beautiful sister as a walking companion.

"I don't want her," she muttered to Kathe; "she will deck herself out and look lovelier than ever and will spoil our walk—and—and—I wish she wouldn't come."

"Never mind; we will try and enjoy it all the same, darling," was Kathe's soothing reply.

It was a lovely April day. The sun was shining clear and bright in the blue cloudless heavens; the air was soft and warm and sweet with the perfume of wild violets along the

road leading to the forest, and in the forest itself the sun gleamed so joyously through every branch and twig, and streamed in such broad glittering rays from between the knotty trunks on the greensward under the trees that it almost seemed as if some giant hand had lifted the dark canopy from overhead and left the usually somber paths and walks exposed to the beautiful shining sunlight. Thousands of tiny pale green shoots were sprouting out from the twigs and branches of the weather-beaten trees, and underneath in damp mossy nooks the lovely little blue-bell raised its delicate head.

Kathe loved the little flower, and while Flora and Henriette sauntered on toward the fir valley she lingered behind to pluck a handful of the blossoms.

Usually the forest was still and desolate, and one might wander for hours under its shade without meeting a soul or encountering a living thing. But this happened to be one of the days when the poor of the neighborhood were allowed to congregate together for the purpose of gathering as much of the dried and decayed wood as they could carry to their homes.

As Kathe hunted about for her favorite flower she heard voices in the distance, and she had only just remembered the fact that this was the "poor people's day," as it was called, when raising her head she saw close before her a woman in the act of breaking off a fine strong branch from one of the trees. Was it because she was caught with a green branch in her hand, or because the sudden appearance of the young girl startled her in her dishonest act that she cast a lowering, angry glance on Kathe, and muttered some imprecation as she pushed back the linen kerchief from her untidy head?

The look surprised but did not frighten Kathe. She stooped again to gather a group of anemones at her feet, when a weak but shrill cry for help fell on her ear, succeeded by an indistinct tumult of many voices.

The woman listened for a moment, then flung down the branch and darted through the brushwood toward the place from whence the noise came. Again Kathe heard the shrill trembling cry, and recognized Henriette's voice. Quick as an arrow she rushed after the woman, tearing her dress as she made her way through the brushwood, and getting many a knock from the on-bounding branches the woman's powerful arms struck aside, but she reached the spot at last.

The first thing she saw as she emerged from the thicket was a group of women and ragged boys standing under a pine-tree, talking and gesticulating in the wildest manner. The next glance showed her Flora's white felt hat with its droop-

ing blue feather, forming a striking center to the dirty kerchiefs and straggling hair of the women around her.

"Let the dwarf alone, Friz!" screamed one of the women.

"But she is screaming like mad," replied a boy's voice.

"Let her yell—none can hear her," insisted the woman, who had a repulsive face with small luring eyes and a tall gaunt frame.

Then Flora spoke, but Kathe could not hear what she said.

An insolent derisive laugh answered her.

"Get out o' your way!" shouted the big woman. "D'ye think we'll do it, may be? This place is free for all to come and go in. The poorest beggar as well as such as you, frau-lein, and I'll see who'll dare keep me away. Look here, good people, we only see her face when she be sitting in her carriage with the horses a-tearing along, and we be glad to clear out of her way. A beautiful woman you be, frau-lein—even yer enemie 'll say that—and all's real, too, no paint nor nothing; yer skin's like velvet—I shouldn't mind biting it—" and she stooped her head, and pushed her face under the white hat.

The woman whom Kathe had followed pushed her way into the midst of the crowd, and pointing to the young girl behind called out, in a coarse tone:

"There be another!"

All turned to look at Kathe, thus giving the latter an opportunity of seeing Flora leaning against a tree, her cheeks and lips white as snow, and her whole figure trembling.

"She be nothing to us," cried a boy, and turned his back on the young girl; the women followed his example, closing in again round Flora.

"Kathe!" called Henriette from behind this crowd of women, but a rough hand was placed across her mouth to prevent her speaking. In a moment two or three of the boys were pushed half over, and before the women had time to resist the force of her strong young arms, Kathe had elbowed her way to her sister's side.

"What do you all want?" she asked, in a loud firm voice, facing the dirty women boldly.

For a moment the angry women were awed and startled—but only for a moment—the next they saw it was only a young, bright-looking girl, and a loud laugh greeted her question.

"Just hear how short and sharp she asks, as if she were the judge hisself," screamed the giantess.

"And looks as proud as if she had descended from the three Holy Kings," broke in the woman whom Kathe had first

seen. "Why, your own grandmother came out of my village, and never had shoe or stocking to her feet when a little un—and your grandpa, too, used to carry hods o' mortar for old—"

"Do you think I don't know it, or that I am ashamed of it?" interrupted Kathe, quietly and calmly, though her earnest face was pale and her lips trembled.

"No one ought better. Has his money done you any good—all his heaps o' money?" cried another of the women, pushing herself close to Kathe. Seizing her silk dress, and rubbing it between her dirty fingers, she went on: "Ah, a lovely dress, a dress for town on Suadays, and you a-wearing it in the middle of the week in the forest, to be torn by the branches. All very well for you—the money's there in plenty—baskets full of it was found when the old un died. But how did he get it? You'd better not ask, fraulein. How should it matter to you that your grandpa bought up all the corn away from the poor and stored it up in his granaries, and then he said that the price of grain must go up, up, far too high for us, before he would sell one bit, though the people were starving—"

"It's false!" broke in Kathe; "quite false."

"Ha! false, is it? Is it false, too, that we are being thrown into the clutches of those who will grudge us our last potato? Trouble will come o' this, I can tell ye. My girl says she will drown herself sooner nor work for usurers."

"And my brother says he will shoot them over the hemp first time they appear," shouted out a small, ill-grown lad.

"Ay, ay, as he did the pigeons belonging to the pale little dwarf there," remarked another, pointing to Henriette, who was clinging to Kathe, exhausted with fright and fatigue.

The loud barking of a dog close by silenced the shouts for a while. Flora sprung up from her crouching position on the ground, the haughty expression usual to her returning to her face.

"What have I to do with the sale of the factory?" she asked, contemptuously. "Settle that with your late master the counselor—he will know how to answer your insolence; and now out of my way! Your shameful behavior will be punished severely—of that you may be sure."

She stretched out her hand to wave the women off, but the tall gaunt woman seized it, and heartily shook the lily-white hand as if it had been held forth in sign of friendship, while an evil smile flitted round her ugly mouth.

"Ha! ha! fraulein," she exclaimed, with a coarse chuckle; "we've got back our courage and proud manner because a

dog barked over there!" she pointed over her shoulder. "That's old Sonneman's terrier; I know his voice well enough. The old man is stone deaf, and his dog won't leave him. They're a-going to the village up yonder, as they do every day. Be quiet; they won't come this way. So it doesn't matter to you, a beautiful young woman, that the factory is sold, eh? Who would think it or believe it? One has only to look at you to see the whole thing. You and the old madame rule and command and make the counselor obey you both, and now he is rich enough, you think the poor people who have earned him his money are to be chucked over just like chaff from wheat. No, no; we can't alter it, of course, but we'll be revenged on you, my beauty;" and as the woman stooped her tall frame to peer into Flora's face her eyes glittered with the cruelty of a cat's.

Flora covered her face with her hands.

"Good God! they mean to murder us!" she murmured between her trembling lips.

The women who heard her laughed out loud.

"No such thing, fraulein!" said the tall one; "we are not so stupid; we should gain nothing by it but that," and she made an expressive gesture round her brawny throat. "You shall only have a small punishment."

Uncovering her face and nervously dragging at her pocket, Flora drew forth her purse, opened it, and cast the contents, silver and gold, on the ground. The women did not move, but one or two of the nearest boys sprung forward to pick up the shining pieces.

"Let it alone!" exclaimed the big woman, planting her tall person over the scattered money. "There is time for that later on—*later on*, fraulein," and she turned with grim politeness to Flora. "First your punishment."

"Touch us if you dare!" said Kathe, standing her ground firmly, though both sisters were trying to shelter themselves behind her.

"You? what do you meddle for? and why shouldn't I dare? I shall only get a week or two; they don't give more for a box on the ears or a few scratches on the face—and those you shall have, fraulein, as sure as I'm alive," she added, addressing Flora. "I'll so spoil that lovely skin o' yours that you'll never forget me; you'll get a face as nicely marked as a tiger in a menagerie."

Quick as lightning she raised her hand to scratch Flora's face with her dirty nails; but quick as she was Kathe frustrated her intention by pushing her away with such force that

she lost her balance and stumbled up against two or three of the others standing by.

"Help! help!" screamed Henriette, with excited strength, while Flora flung herself down by the tree, and hid her face among its gnarled roots.

"Help!" shouted Henriette again, with all her remaining force, as the women seized hold of Kathe, tore off the cape from her shoulders, and trod her hat under foot.

One of them had just grasped a long plait of hair which hung down her back, when the lad who had again covered Henriette's mouth with his hand, suddenly drew it away, exclaiming:

"Look! look at her! What's the matter?" and, dashing through the crowd, escaped into the forest.

Blood was streaming from the poor girl's mouth. That last effort at calling for help had been too much for her; she had ruptured a blood-vessel with the cry.

For two or three seconds the crowd of angry, infuriated women stared, horrified at the sight of the suffering girl, whose pale face, with the life-blood oozing from her lips, looked deathly in its ashen hue; then, with one accord, they silently retreated into the shadow of the dense forest, and left the three girls alone.

Putting her arms round the fainting girl, Kathe gently let herself glide to the ground, and supported the helpless head on her bosom. In this position the blood ceased to flow.

"Fetch help fast as you can!" sobbed Kathe. "She will die! Oh, be quick! be quick!"

"Are you mad?" said Flora, in a smothered tone, with her hands clasped across her breast, and gazing, terror-struck, at the pair at her feet. "Would you have me throw myself into the hands of those wretches? They are still there," and she shuddered as she glanced uneasily toward the thicket, from which one or two boys' heads appeared, looking eagerly at the gold lying on the ground. "I will not stir from this place *alone*. We must try and get Henriette away ourselves."

Kathe did not answer. She saw it was useless to battle against such heartless selfishness; so, pointing to Flora to help her move the fainting girl, she struggled to her feet, and succeeded in lifting the small, slight form in her arms, rested the head on her shoulder, and carried her slowly out of the forest. Fearful of giving her the slightest shake that might cause a return of the distressing hemorrhage, Kathe carefully wended her way over the smoothest path, standing still every now and again to watch if the movement was painful for her burden.

"Oh, don't stop! don't stop till we are within call for aid—till we are out of the reach of those murderous wretches, unless you wish me to die of fright!" entreated Flora, as she walked along by Kathe's side with her usual proud bearing but stealthily watching every bush and tree, so as to take flight at the first approach of one of the "wretches."

"What has become of her boasted courage, of the 'soldier's courage and self-confidence' Henriette was taunting her with this morning?" thought Kathe, her arms aching under the weight of the burden she carried. "It's all very well to write about woman's strength of intellect being equal to man's; she should show, by womanly acts and self-forgetfulness, that she is capable of something better than—"

The thought was not finished, for a slight movement of Henriette's attracted her attention and made her hasten her steps to reach home.

CHAPTER II.

AT last they stood outside the forest, in the open sunny field. The danger of pursuit was over, the town was visible before them, peasants were working on the meadows within the sound of a call for help, and the road leading to the park and villa was close at hand.

But Kathe's eyes were riveted on a spot which Flora did not notice—the low, sloping roof, with its high chimney-pots and gilded weather-cock, visible through the apple-orchard belonging to the house on the forest-side. She saw the garden gate leading up to the hall door was wide open. It was much nearer than the park gate, and thither Kathe wended her steps, after a short rest under a wide-spreading oak-tree.

"Where are you going?" demanded Flora, who was hastening toward the villa.

"To Doctor Bruck's house," was the quiet reply. "It is nearer than the villa. I shall be able to lay Henriette on a bed, and most likely the doctor himself is at home to attend to her."

Flora knit her brows and looked angry; but whether or not she feared the revengeful woman's reappearance, or shrunk from walking through the park up to the house alone, with her bare head and disordered toilet, she made no resistance, but silently turned and followed her half-sister.

The field was passed in silence. The sun shone hot and scorching on Kathe's burning temples. Her strength was beginning to fail; the way was rough, and the fainting girl in

her arms seemed to grow heavier and heavier. She looked longingly toward the house, and gathered up all her remaining force to accomplish the fifty yards or so that still had to be traversed ere reaching a place of rest. She looked again, and saw a man in his shirt-sleeves making a small arbor under the shadow of one of the trees; the widow, standing near him, a white cap on her head, a broad linen apron half covering her black dress, in her hand a plate of black bread and butter, that was evidently intended for the workman's four o'clock meal. She did not turn her head toward the road, or she would have seen Kathe struggling to reach the orchard with Henriette's lifeless form in her arms.

But ere Kathe had time to attract her attention the doctor appeared at the corner of the house.

"Bruck!" rang out Flora's clear, musical voice.

He stood still and stared for a second at the advancing group, as if he could not believe the evidence of his eyes; the next he bounded forward, and, with a few long strides, was close upon them.

"What has happened?" he said, breathlessly.

"I have been mobbed by angry women," replied Flora, with a bitter smile, but with her usual cold, indifferent manner. "The vagabonds were in earnest when they threatened me—I was in great danger from their violence, and the poor child there," pointing to Henriette, "ruptured a blood-vessel from fright and excitement."

He merely glanced at her to see if she was unhurt—then stretched out his arms, and tenderly lifted the burden from Kathe's shoulder.

"You have exerted yourself beyond your strength," he said, gently, as he looked into the girl's heated face; she was trembling from head to foot, and biting her lip to keep back the tears as she clung to the doctor's arm to prevent herself from falling to the ground, while Flora stood looking fresh and cool, with only a slight color tinging her delicate cheeks.

"You ought not to have allowed her to carry Henriette all alone," the doctor remarked to his betrothed as he hastened back to the house with Henriette in his arms.

"You don't surely expect me to carry her? Besides *you* have no right to find fault," answered Flora, sharply; "I know my duty, I hope, and I should have helped to carry the poor child, only I knew that it would have been utter madness. I am not strong, and it could not hurt Kathe's extra robust peasant-like strength to do it."

He did not reply, but called to his aunt to run in-doors and prepare a bed immediately for the lifeless girl in his arms.

The widow gave a quick shocked glance at the advancing figures, and without a word obeyed her nephew's behest so quickly that by the time he stepped into the hall she had spread a clean sweet-smelling sheet on the bed in the spare room, and silently motioned to him to lay the girl down.

The apartment was large and pleasantly lighted by two immense windows—the uncarpeted floor was as white and shining as scrubbing and bee's-wax could make it, but the paper on the walls was faded and dim, and in the corner opposite the door stood an old-fashioned stove of black Dutch tiles. On one side was an antiquated folding-screen covered with queer Chinese figures, on the other was a small round table of dark wood matching the frames of two or three amateur drawings which hung on the faded walls. The only article of luxury in the room was the bright, rosy chintz curtain hanging at each window, but a sweet fresh perfume of lavender pervaded the whole air.

Across the doctor's brow lay an anxious look as he bent over his patient, and with a skillful gentle hand bathed her chin and throat to clear away the ghastly effects of the hemorrhage. At last she opened her eyes and recognized him, but she was too weak to speak or move.

A messenger had been sent to the villa to acquaint old Mme. Urach with the misfortune that had befallen her granddaughter, and till she arrived not a word was spoken in the sick-room. Flora stood motionless at the window, Kathe sat in a corner by the bedside, and the widow glided noiselessly about, waiting on her nephew, and bringing him the things he needed to restore Henriette to consciousness.

The old lady appeared much distressed when she entered the room, especially when she saw Henriette's deathly pale face and closed eyelids.

"For God's sake tell me how it all happened?" she asked, her voice sounding excited and shrill, breaking in upon the silence of the last half hour.

Henriette shivered and moaned, but did not open her eyes.

Flora was the only one who attempted to explain to her grandmother what had happened. According to her she had been attacked by a crowd of furies, each one more anxious than the others to do her some personal harm, and Kathe could scarcely restrain from a smile, as she went on to describe how, for a time, she had kept them at bay by her own courage and presence of mind, till the accident happened which fright-

ened them away, and left her and Kathe free to leave the forest.

Mme. Urach walked up and down the room during this recital, not heeding in her agitation the torture she was inflicting on the poor invalid's nerves by the monotonous rustling of her silk skirts on the deal boards.

"What does our philanthropist say to this?" she asked, sharply, suddenly standing still and eying the doctor with anything but a friendly look.

He did not answer; he was holding Henriette's hand in his, and apparently intent on counting the feeble pulse under his fingers; but a sorrowful smile passed over his handsome young face, and a pitying look crept into his eyes, which no one noticed but Kathe.

Presently the old lady moved up to the bedside, and stooping her head as she gazed at the pale shrunken face lying on the pillow, said, pointedly:

"She looks very ill, Herr Doctor. What do you say to sending at once for my old friend and physician, Doctor von Bar, and having a consultation with him? You surely won't object?"

"Of course not, madame," releasing the patient's hand. "It is only my duty to do anything that will ease your anxiety;" and he left the room to send a message to the great physician's residence in town.

He had no sooner closed the door than Mme. Urach exclaimed, in a subdued voice:

"A nice mess you have put me in, by bringing Henriette here. Whatever made you do it?"

"It was Kathe's fault, not mine—that you might guess, grandmamma," replied Flora, bitterly. "You ought to reproach her and not me for obliging us to remain in this hole, for who knows how long—perhaps for weeks," and her eyes flashed angrily across at Kathe.

"How thoughtless to lay the poor child in that direction. Each time she opens her eyes she must look at that hideous black stone! And those daubs on the walls, too, how fearful!" Then, turning toward the bed again, she added: "The bed itself seems not so bad; at all events the sheets are fine and white, but I must send over a silk eider-down cover for her instead of that cotton thing, also a good easy-chair for my old friend when he comes, and above all another basin—this one is odious," she went on, removing it from the wash-stand with a clatter that made the invalid moan again. "How can people live with such coarse things about them? I don't believe they

even notice them! What is it, my angel—do you want anything?”

Henriette half raised her head, glanced sharply at her grandmother for a moment, then closed her eyes again, and with the first sign of returning strength pushed aside the hand that lay on hers.

“As willful as ever!” sighed her grandmother, and sunk on to a chair by the bedside.

They had not long to wait for the court physician. When the message reached him, begging him to come at once to the house by the river, he could hardly believe his ears when the man added that “Madame Urach” was there. Curiosity and surprise hastened his departure, and in a very short while his elegant carriage conveyed him to the rustic bridge in front of the old house. He was a handsome old gentleman, neat and spruce from head to foot, and with pleasing cordial manners. He was the favorite physician of the reigning duke, had been rewarded for his services with the high-sounding title of “Medicinalrath” and the right to add to his name the coveted noble prefix of *von*, besides having received many decorations and several costly snuff-boxes mounted with precious stones.

“A pity, a very great pity this has happened,” he said, approaching the bed on which Henriette was lying. After regarding her pale face with an anxious look for a moment or two he began sounding her chest—lightly and carefully as he did it the girl moaned with pain more than once. Dr. Bruck stood by, silently watching the great man’s proceedings, wondering why he should torture the poor girl with sounding her lungs, when in her present state such an act was not necessary. When she moaned a second time the young man frowned and said, decisively, to put an end to the examination:

“Shall I tell you the result of my observations, Herr von Bar?”

The older man understood the purport of the question, and a bitter rancorous glance flashed from his eyes ere he replied:

“Certainly, when I have finished my investigation;” and he continued sounding and tapping for some moments longer.

Then he rose, moved away from the bed, and with a stiff inclination of his head remarked:

“Now, sir, I am at your disposition.”

Not many minutes after the two doctors had quitted the room to consult in private over the case Henriette opened her eyes and began inquiring with a flushed face for her “own doctor,” Dr. Bruck.

“Where is he? I want him. Tell him to come.”

Her excited manner startled Mme. Urach, who immediately rose to fulfill her request, muttering to herself the while a protest against such a “peculiar, very peculiar caprice.”

Short as their absence had been, the consultation between the doctors was evidently over, for as the old lady entered the sitting-room the court physician was about to write a prescription. Dr. Bruck returned to the sick-chamber, and Mme. Urach was left alone with her old friend.

To her question of what he thought of the “dear’s girl’s” case, he gave a short, pointed reply, intimated in plain language that the case had been mishandled from the beginning, and growled out something about its being too late to send for him when hope was over, and reproached the old lady for yielding to Henriette’s whim in the choice of her medical attendant, instead of obliging her to submit to be treated by the one who had known and studied her constitution from a child.

“However, the first thing to be done now is to have the poor child removed as soon as possible to her own comfortable and well-furnished room,” he added, more pleasantly. “She will feel better there; besides, I shall then be sure that my orders will be carried out, whereas they will not be so here, I know very well.”

He touched the nib of his pen with his thumb-nail, and was dipping it in the ink, when his eye fell on an open velvet case lying near some books on the table, which apparently were only just unpacked.

Never had Mme. Urach seen the face of her “old friend” look so utterly blank with dismay and astonishment as it did now when the pen fell out of his hand, and he exclaimed:

“Good heavens, here is the Grand Cross of Darmstadt!”

He touched it with the tip of his finger.

“How could it have got here, I wonder, in such an out-of-the-way place as this poor house?”

“Astonishing!” observed Mme. Urach, while a flush of annoyance and surprise passed over her face as she bent forward to examine the case with her eyeglass in her hand. “I don’t know the decoration myself, or its meaning.”

“I dare say not, madame; it is so very rarely bestowed on any one,” interrupted the court physician.

“Otherwise I might imagine the decoration was conferred on him during the war,” continued Mme. Urach, unmoved.

“Nothing of the kind, nothing of the kind!” growled the old doctor, in a voice which showed how much the discovery

of the case and its brilliant order had disturbed his equanimity. "In the first place no one obtains this decoration except for some personal service done to or for a member of the royal family; and next, I should like to see the man who, possessing such a distinction, would keep it secret for years. I wonder what he did to obtain it—*why* it was bestowed on him," he went on, thoughtfully, more to himself than his companion, as he slowly passed his hand over his forehead, and absently regarded the brilliant diamond rings on his fingers, which had been given to him by his own royal duke. But what were they in comparison with the contents of that glittering case on the table? "This is the most coveted decoration of all," he continued; "men of the highest rank vie with each other for its possession, and yet here it lies unheeded and apparently unvalued by a fellow, who, from sheer ignorance in his profession, has deservedly got himself into trouble. Pardon me, madame, but it slipped out," he checked himself to say as he noticed the heightened color of the proud old lady at this slighting mention of her intended grandson-in-law. "But really it is too bad not to know *why* he had that thing thrown round his neck. I can't even make a conjecture about it."

"I don't suppose the honor was conferred on him for any *professional* service," remarked Mme. Urach, with a smile, as she watched the impatient strides of her old friend up and down the room, adding, after a moment: "But how came he at the court at all to win the distinction?"

The court physician stood and laughed aloud.

"My dear madame, you ask a question that it would never have entered my head to ask, simply because the thing itself is an impossibility, unless the world were turned upside down and truth and honor were trampled under foot. No, no; he must have been on some mission. I wonder of what kind?" the old man continued, tapping with his fingers an impatient tattoo against the window-sill. Then, in a low tone, he added, over his shoulder: "He was away for a week or ten days, and no one knew where he went? H'm, that's bad! Sneaks who never mention anything about their doings are sure to have good reasons for keeping them dark; there are things done in the medical profession which no honorable man would lend his hand to. However, I am silent; it has never been my habit to tear away the veil of another man's secret; everything must take its course as He above wills." He pointed with such a devout and reverential air toward the ceiling that any one who did not know him so well as Mme. Urach might have been deceived. He sat down at the table and scribbled off the

prescription so quickly that it seemed as if the presence of the velvet case had put quicksilver into his fingers. "One thing I shall leave to you, my honored friend; you have so much tact and diplomatic wisdom that, of course, I need not remind you to be cautious, but try and find out a little about this," and he pointed to the order. "I would like to know something of its origin before Bruck begins boasting of this dubious honor, and we can ignore it now."

The old lady did not answer at once. She had been watching him quietly while he wrote his prescription, and noticed for the first time that his face had very much altered lately; the cheeks were as florid and blooming as usual, but there was a worried, anxious expression about his mouth and eyes that seemed to denote some hidden trouble, and the lines around the nose and brow were deeper, as if he had suffered from want of sleep. And she remembered then that he had lately thrown out several hints about royal personages and bad temper. What if she were about to lose him? not by death, that it did not enter her thoughts; but if he lost his post as court physician what would become of him? and she would thus lose her principal link with the court. But no, such a thing was not going to happen. The good old man was too fond of the table, he was getting indigestion, and, becoming gouty, saw things in a contrary light.

"But, my dear Herr von Bar, how do you know that this belongs to the doctor himself?" she asked, with all the confidence of a woman of the world. "I don't think so, and, what is more, I shall *not* believe it till I know the reason for its being here. Besides, no matter how he got it if it is his, it won't be of any use or service to him in this part of the world, for the whole town have completely and forever tabooed him from the position he held. I will do as you wish, however, willingly, and find out the meaning of its presence in this house, solely for *your*—"

She checked herself, for just at that moment a door-handle turned, and the mistress of the house entered the room to fetch some linen from the press.

The court physician rose, handed the prescription to Mme. Urach, and both were leaving the apartment when they saw the widow pause by the table and close down the lid of the case in dispute. But much as the old courtier longed to ask two or three questions about the decoration, he had not the courage to confront the calm, proud-looking lady with his curiosity, and he felt obliged to leave the room with his longing unsatisfied.

In the meanwhile matters were progressing favorably in the sick-chamber. Henriette seemed to have recovered from her excessive exhaustion, and was partly raised in bed supported by pillows at her back. Her eyes were open, and she was staring about her in a wild manner; fever had set in, but anything was better than the unconscious state of complete prostration.

Dr. Bruck had fetched the globe of gold-fish from his aunt's sitting-room, and when Mme. Urach and his old friend entered, he was trying to make the tiny fountain work, in order to moisten the air of the room. A large basin of fresh water stood on a table by the bedside, from which he constantly replenished a small bouquet pocket-fountain for the same purpose. And no one watching the young man, in his earnest endeavors to relieve the sufferings of his patient, could have associated his handsome open countenance and untroubled bearing with any conscious act of meanness or dishonor. Even the court physician was obliged to acknowledge this to himself, while he ground his teeth with rage at the possibility of the young man's possessing the rare and highly coveted honor. And for what?

Mme. Urach found Henriette was far too ill to be moved, so she gave orders that the girl's maid should be sent over to sit up with her during the night, as also several articles of furniture to make the room comfortable. Kathe begged to be allowed to take the maid's place and nurse her sister through the night, but Dr. Bruck so sternly forbade any such thing, saying he would have no one but the old lady's-maid by his patient who had nursed Henriette before, that even Mme. Urach and the court physician were surprised into confessing he was right. The tears rose to Kathe's eyes at the cold, almost rough manner in which he had replied to her request, and she turned away.

Before Mme. Urach left the house, she and Flora had a short conversation, in which it was agreed that the latter, with Kathe, should remain by Henriette till ten o'clock. It would never do when the whole affair was blazed abroad in town, the next day, for it to be hinted that the proud girl had deserted her sisterly post by Henriette's bedside to the care of her young half-sister Kathe, and for this reason, and no other, she consented to remain under Dr. Bruck's roof till Nanni came to fetch them both at ten o'clock.

CHAPTER III.

SOON after Mme. Urach's departure, several men-servants appeared laden with articles of furniture and "comforts" for the sick-room. When put in their appointed places, the apartment looked incongruous and wanting in taste. The elegant screen made the black chipped stone look out of place—the gold-bordered porcelain washing basin and appurtenances, the rich satin easy-chair and inlaid table by the bedside, together with a variegated Turkey rug, formed a ridiculous contrast to the faded red walls, simple chintz curtains, and old-fashioned bedstead of the room.

Softly, and without noise, the widow called her maid, and helped her remove the simple plain articles that were no longer needed. Not once did she look across at her nephew, who was standing by the window, silently regarding the change in the room; perhaps she feared to see the angry flush on his brow, and the indignant curl of his lip; and she would not have felt more comfortable if she had caught his eye, so she studiously avoided glancing toward him.

Flora superintended the arrangements; with her own fair hands, she spread a green silk coverlet over Henriette's bed, and contemptuously cast off a light eider-down, covered with fine, clean dimity, to make room for it. After sprinkling a bottle of *eau-de-Cologne* over the boards, she bade one of the servants lay a smaller Turkey rug in one of the bow-windows, and place a *fauteuil* on it, in which she sunk down and crossed her pretty feet on an elegant little stool close by. Seeing through the small mirror with a brown wooden frame that her hair was out of order, she took a small lace scarf from off her shoulders, and daintily fastened it on her head to hide its rough appearance. The white, soft cambric was so becoming to her lovely face, and looked so like a halo of glory as she leaned her head in a graceful attitude against the back of the chair, that the widow gazed at her in genuine admiration, and thought to herself, that she could partly understand *now* why her nephew had loved so madly this proud girl who scarcely spoke to him and seemed to think of no one but herself and her own ease.

The afternoon wore on, and the setting sun began to fill the room with beautiful purple and crimson rays. No one spoke. Henriette objected to the blinds being lowered, and begged in

her feeble voice "that they would not walk about on tiptoe;" it made her suppose they thought her worse than she was.

The doctor left the room to fetch a book; when he returned, he was accompanied by his aunt carrying a tray, on which stood two cups of deliciously perfumed tea. The cloth which covered the tray was of the very best damask; the cups were of rare and costly china, the spoons of old-fashioned pattern and size, but of pure silver; and a plate of tempting sweet cakes stood by a sugar-basin and cream-jug of the same pattern and silver as the spoons.

The grand, noble-looking lady in her white linen apron stepped forward, and courteously invited her beautiful guest to partake of the tempting refreshment.

"You baked the cakes yourself!" said Flora, half rising from her lounge. "Ah! I smelled the batter from here when you opened the kitchen door—how nice!" and she clasped her hands together with naïve astonishment. "A poor ignorant thing in household affairs, like me, has no idea how such dainties are made; but what an amount of patience, and how much time they must take to do!"

"Oh, no, not if one manages properly; besides, it is done quickly when one is accustomed to it," said the widow, laughing; "and I can't be slow over anything. I have a great deal of time on my hands, as I am not always strong enough for domestic duties. Last winter I set myself the task of reading the Bible through, from beginning to end—"

"As a religious duty?" asked Flora.

"No, I didn't need that; I think I know by heart all the parts relating to our daily life, and how one ought to behave, but while this political and religious struggle is going on, I think it behooves every one to have their weapons well in order, that they may be ready, if called upon, to fight. The question touches women as well as men, so I thought I would study all the parts, and convince myself if what is being said is truth."

Flora looked up in astonishment—that any one should read the Bible from beginning to end, for the simple purpose of being convinced of the truth of any statement, was to her incomprehensible; but that this widow should think fit to prepare her weapons to join in the struggle going on in the world, was really almost absurd. What had she and the world to do with each other? Ah! now she understood the secrets of Dr. Bruck's ridiculous remarks about his ideal of a woman, that she ought to be "domestic," that is a good cook, and a helpmeet!

While Flora was turning over these thoughts in her mind, Kathe rose from her seat and took the tea-tray from the old lady's hand, and being able to read the signs of a coming storm in her beautiful half-sister's face, she urged her to drink a cup of tea.

"No, thanks, I feel too upset to take anything," she said, irritably; but a few minutes later, Kathe saw her take from her pocket an elegant bonbonnière, and covertly eat several chocolate drops, while the others were enjoying the fragrant beverage.

The sun was sending forth his last rays of golden glory, and those in the sick-room were watching the crimson light playing caressingly as it were on Flora's bent head in the window recess, when Henriette moaned and whispered anxiously as if in fear: "Take it away! there is arsenic in green—take it away!" and tried with her feeble strength to push the silk coverlet from the bed.

Kathe removed the obnoxious covering at once, and laid over the suffering girl the cool linen one which had been there when they first entered the room.

"That's nice," went on Henriette, her eyes half open and rolling eagerly around. "Don't let her come here again if she puts that green thing on me! Grandmamma is false, false like all her drawing-room clique, she and that old horror her great authority. If he touches me again I'll scream," she hissed; then raising herself she seized Kathe's hand and said solemnly to Dr. Bruck: "Take care he does you no harm or grandmamma either! As to her," and her tones became very excited, "you know who I mean—well, she smokes and drives the wild ponies simply because you asked her not to do it—she is false, falser than all."

"Very interesting, I must say!" whispered Flora, ensconcing herself more comfortably in her seat, while Kathe glanced across at Dr. Bruck, who was quietly leaning against the screen.

"You remember how things used to be, doctor?" went on Henriette. "How she sent you letters half a dozen times a day, no matter what the weather was? How she used to fidget if you didn't come to the exact moment, and directly you arrived, how she would put both arms round your neck and cling to you as if she never meant to part from you? You hear me, doctor, don't you?"

Flora sprung up, her face scarlet, her silk skirts rustling noisily on the deal boards. "Give her some morphine!" she

exclaimed: "she is delirious—make her sleep. Such ravings are not to be endured. Do as I say at once!"

But he only smiled and looked at her with compassion, as the red flush which his patient's words had started to his cheek died away and left him strangely pale. He did not move or make any reply.

Flora flung herself back in her seat, and turned her face toward the window.

"Did you ever dream all that would change, Doctor Bruck—that she would ever tell you it was all a mistake?" asked the sick girl, excitedly, seizing hold of Kathe's hand and holding it fast, as she tried to raise herself from her recumbent position.

Kathe's heart beat fast. She dared not look at the young man now, after that strange, searching question. Bending over the half-delirious girl, she laid her cool hand on her forehead, hoping to change the current of her wild thoughts.

"Ah—how nice!" said the invalid, in a quieter tone. Then, after a moment she added, feverishly: "Flora always took his hand away when he laid it on my forehead—she was jealous of even me—terribly jealous."

A low mocking laugh came from the window recess, but Henriette took no notice of it, apparently she did not even hear it.

"I can't sleep for thinking of all the misery that is coming to you," she moaned out as if in pain. "You will shun our house and never mention our name, and be a miserable man, for she means to break her engagement at every cost—"

In her distress and agony at hearing these true revelations, Kathe laid her finger on the poor excited girl's mouth, but the action seemed to excite her more.

"How dare you touch my lips like that horrid fellow in the forest?"

Flora sprung from her seat a second time, hurried over to the bed, pushed Kathe almost rudely aside, and standing in her place, cried out, beesechingly:

"Don't stop her—let her say what she likes!"

"Yes, what she likes," repeated Henriette, beginning to stammer from exhaustion, but pleased as a child to have her own way. "Who will tell you the truth, doctor, if I don't? Who else will warn you? Be on your guard, or she will fly away from you like the doves from a tree. She means to be *free*, I can tell you!"

"Whatever else she says, there is truth in *that*," interrupted Flora, firmly, drawing a step nearer the young man. "She is

quite right; I can not keep my promise to you, Leo. Will you give me up, let me be free?" she added, clasping her hands and speaking in a sweet, earnest tone that startled Kathe, it was so musical and soft.

The young man's face was white as death as he silently and sternly looked at the beautiful suppliant. He seemed as if it was impossible for him to speak just now. He stretched out his hand to wave her away, but she took it in both hers and repeated:

"You will give me back my freedom, Leo?"

"This is not the place for the separation you seek."

"But the right moment. Another has said the words I have been longing for months past to utter—only I hadn't the courage—"

"Because it would be a notorious violation of faith on your part."

She bit her lip.

"Your remark is hard and scarcely to the point—our engagement was not quite of such a serious nature. No one has taken your place in my heart. Don't smile so sarcastically, Leo. Indeed I mean it," she added, passionately; "I am not thinking of any other husband. But I'll even run the risk of that reproach," she said, after a moment more, composedly, "if you will consent to my prayer and keep us from making each other miserable."

"Don't bring my happiness or unhappiness into the discussion. You can't possibly know what I understand by either; but I think you will have to acknowledge to yourself even that neither one nor the other will have any influence over the way a man should act in defending his honor and self-esteem. And now I must beg you to be silent on the subject, so as not to excite your sister."

He turned away and walked over to the window. Flora followed him.

"Henriette is not listening," she said.

The poor little invalid had fallen back on her pillows and lay quite still.

Lowering her voice and leaning toward him, Flora continued in a beseeching tone:

"I *must* and will have a clear and distinct understanding between us. Why put off what can be done just as well now?" and she played nervously with the third finger of her left hand. "Answer me!"

"What are you exchanging life by my side for?" he asked,

suddenly, facing round upon her so brusquely that she drew back.

"Is it necessary to tell you that?" she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief, pushing back her hair. "Can't you see how my whole soul longs to be entirely devoted to literature? How can I give myself up to the inspiration of my talent if I undertake wifely duties? No! never, never! It must not, *can not* be!"

"It's very strange that this enthusiasm for literary pursuits has only lately taken possession of you. It is scarcely a month since you—"

"You mean to say that I have lived nine-and-twenty years without any wish for fame," she interrupted, with a glowing face. "Explain that as you will, put it down to the woman's nature who fluctuates between this and that, tries one thing and the other till she finds the right."

"But are you sure you are right now in wishing to devote your life to literature?"

"As sure as that the needle points to the pole."

He did not reply. His face assumed a very grave expression, and his brow contracted as if with pain. Yet, in spite of the gravity of his countenance, his dark, gray eyes gazed down on the woman at his side with a loving pity and tenderness shining in them that one would have thought must have moved the heart of a stone. Then he slowly turned away and crossed the room. He took up the medicine bottle and spoon, and went near the bed.

Henriette had fallen asleep, still holding Kathe's hand. Several times Kathe had tried to draw her hand away in order to leave the room; but each movement of hers seemed to disturb the invalid, who moaned and opened her eyes for a second, and held her fingers in a closer clasp; thus the young girl was forced, against her will, to be a witness to the painful scene between the lovers.

When the doctor approached the bed he did not appear to notice Kathe's presence; he seemed to be doing his duty mechanically, as if hardly conscious of what he was about. For a moment he looked earnestly at the sleeping girl, then attempted to feel her pulse. In doing so he accidentally touched Kathe's hand, which made him start so violently and change color so rapidly that she in her turn started and drew her hand from Henriette's clasp, wondering why he should be so nervous that a touch of her fingers had such an effect on him. Was he suffering from the shock of Flora's bitter

words? She stole a shy glance at him, and heard him heave a deep sigh, as he put the bottle and spoon back on the table.

Flora seemed to be getting more angry and impatient each moment. She paced the room once or twice, then suddenly hesitated and followed the doctor to the table. His silence and attention to his duties where the invalid was concerned, in the middle of a discussion that was to influence the future of both their lives, irritated her beyond measure.

With trembling lips and flashing eyes, she said:

"It was very foolish of me to speak so openly of my feelings just now. You hate and despise talented women, and many of your sex have a horror of a woman being independent and standing on her own rights—"

"If it is *not* possible for her to do so, certainly."

For the space of one moment she wildly clinched her hands, and stared at him in speechless dismay; recovering herself the next, she replied, sharply:

"What do you mean by saying that?"

A flush passed over his face, and his brows contracted as if he shrunk from the sharp, metallic ring of her voice. His was a sensitive nature, and this war of words with his promised wife was evidently very distasteful to his inclinations.

After a slight hesitation, he answered, calmly, but wearily:

"I mean that this 'standing on her own rights,' which is quite legitimate for a woman who does not neglect home duties or home ties, requires more strength and tenacity of will, a more complete abnegation of womanly vanity, and more real sterling talent than you are aware of."

"And you dispute my talents?"

"I have read your recent article on woman's rights and the labor question," and his voice trembled with the slightest accent of irony.

Flora started back as if she had been struck.

"How do you know that the article you read was mine?" she asked, hesitatingly, while she looked him straight in the eyes with feverish excitement. "I write under a cipher."

"But your cipher has been whispered from one to the other among your large circle of friends, till it was tolerably well known ere it appeared in print."

For a moment she drooped her eyes with shame.

"Well, you have read it," she said, presently; "but what am I to think of your silence on the subject—of your not once having expressed your disapproval?"

"Would you have ceased writing if I had?"

"No—a thousand times no!"

"That I knew. Hence I determined to be silent till we were married; for I am sure that a sensible wife will conform to her husband's wishes, and not isolate herself from his side to strive after impossibilities, but prove she has talents by being his companion and—"

"But, then, according to you, I have no talents," she broke in, impetuously.

"Nay, Flora, that I didn't say. You are clever and quick-witted, but not—a genius," he answered, shaking his head, with a smile peeping forth from under his heavy mustache.

For a moment or two she seemed paralyzed at his audacity, then, stretching out her hands in a fury, her face flushing, her eyes like burning coals, she exclaimed:

"Thank God the last link is snapped! You dare to suggest my becoming a slave—a poor, submissive wife, with every spark of poetic inspiration crushed out of me—in order to convert me into a—a nonentity?"

Her raised voice awoke her suffering sister, who started up and stared wildly around her.

Dr. Bruck hastened to the bedside, laid his cool hand on her forehead, spoke a few soothing words to quiet her agitation, and succeeded in persuading her to lie down and close her eyes in sleep.

"I must entreat you not to disturb your sister again; I can not answer for the consequences if you do," he said, turning his head toward Flora, but not moving his hand from Henriette's brow.

"I have nothing more to say," replied Flora, with a willful misunderstanding of meaning, as she drew her gloves from her pocket. "Our engagement is at an end, as your last speech implies, and—I am free—"

"Because I deny you are a genius, as you fancy?" he asked, in a subdued tone.

Then, turning from the bedside, he strode over to where she stood. All the soft tenderness had gone from his eyes—he was a changed man. His tall, broad-shouldered figure towered far above her head, passion and anger seemed to have taken possession of him, as he said, in a voice trembling with emotion and suppressed passion:

"Which of the two did I woo and win, the writer or the woman? Answer me. You know it was you, and you as a simple woman only. As such you put your hand in mine, and promised to be my wife, knowing full well that I disliked publicity for a woman where it could be avoided; that I have chosen you for yourself alone. to be the stay and glory of my

fireside, *not* that you might shine before the world as an author. You knew all this quite well, and at that time it pleased you to suppress any wishes to the contrary you might have had. I am very much astonished that you yourself have altered; that you have strayed into the path I would rather you had avoided. You have brains and tact, and ought to have understood that I sought you to be my companion, and the pride and joy of my home—”

He heaved a deep sigh as he checked himself for a moment, but he still gazed sternly on the beautiful face of the woman who stood meekly before him, listening to his words with an air of innocence and unconsciousness of wrong-doing about her that seemed to irritate him, as he went on:

“I have watched with close earnestness the change in you, from the first cloud on your beautiful brow to your entreaty for freedom from our engagement just now. Your very weaknesses, Flora, you are not strong enough to resist; pride, ambition, vanity, even capriciousness of temper, are all there, and yet you aspire to strong-mindedness, wish to play the rôle of a leader in the woman's right question, and claim the privileges of equality with man. What I think of this strange caprice, if it pains or pleases me, if I shall be happy or miserably unhappy in the future, is not the question now. We have solemnly and freely engaged ourselves for life, and so it shall remain. You have been reproached often enough with cruelly playing with men's hearts, and then boasting of your conquest, but you shall not do the same by *me*, of that I warn you. You are *not* free; I do not release you from your engagement, my beautiful mistress. You may commit perjury on your side or not, it is all the same—I mean to keep my word.”

“For shame!” she cried out, passionately. “Will you force me to stand with you at the altar when I swear that—that I don't love you, that—here, now I tell you—that I hate you, it's long since I loved you—do you hear? and that it is only by a strong effort over myself that I refrain from saying that I hate you, Leo, with the bitterest hatred a woman can feel.”

Kathe could bear this scene no longer; with a white face and limbs trembling with fear and anxiety for the consequences of Flora's bold statement, she hurried from the room into the fresh air.

CHAPTER IV.

As Kathe passed through the hall she saw the widow washing up the tea-things at a table in the kitchen near the door. She nodded pleasantly to the young girl, and made a laughing remark about leaving the lovers alone for a little, perfectly unconscious of the sad state of affairs between them. Kathe winced and did not reply, but hurried on to the garden.

The evening was cool, a strong wind had sprung up, and she shivered as she slowly paced the gravel walk unprotected by shawl or wrap from its chilling influence. The hot blood was rushing through her veins, from the unwonted excitement she was in, so that, although she shivered, she was not conscious of the cold wind blowing about her. Her cheeks were burning and her head ached with the emotion caused by the conversation she had just heard.

Hot as her cheeks were they grew still hotter with shame, as she thought over the cruel bitterness of her sister's conduct to a man who was a "thousand times too good for her," though—and Kathe paused and clasped her hands together in amazement—unworthy as Flora was, he would not give her up.

Kathe wandered on beyond the garden, down the pathway till she reached the rustic bridge. There she leaned against its wooden support, and looked over the parapet below into the rushing water, tumbling and gurgling, hurried along by the wind at her feet—some of the spray, as it dashed against the stones, falling on her skirts and wetting her boots. Overhead the full moon was shining brightly—and its reflection appeared visible in the dark, turbulent water, still and unmoved as if fixed there forever. Was this like love, true love? Could love shine like that, in the midst of outward disturbance?

Love was a wonderful passion after all, and led men and women to do strange deeds. Kathe's thoughts as she stood by the bridge, and peered down into the dark waters, wandered away from the scene she had just witnessed to a story the widow had told her a few days before of the last tenant of the old-fashioned house.

She was a young, beautiful widow, who lived there in retirement after the death of her husband, the lord of the adjacent castle. The new lord was a young, handsome fellow, and a cousin by marriage. He had seen the beautiful face of the

young widow shrouded in her weeds, bending over her embroidery-frame at the window, and after a few months he fell into the habit of spurring his noble steed right across the old bridge, and riding close to the window, to have a little talk with the lovely inmate of the house, kiss her delicate white hand, and repeat the vows he had made, that as soon as her term of mourning was over he would fetch her to his castle to reign there again as its mistress.

Then he was obliged to go away to a foreign court, and as the weeks slipped by, and the young widow began to prepare for her second marriage, rumors reached her that the lord of the castle was about to wed a fair and lovely damsel, and bring her to his home to be its mistress. But the young widow would not believe in so must falseness; she only laughed, and sat at her window daily watching for her handsome lover—till one day the blasts of trumpets and the clanging of instruments fell on her ear, and she was told it was in celebration of the arrival of the young lord and his bride at the castle.

A few days later the bride and bridegroom crossed the rustic bridge to pay their respects to the young widow of the late lord. The bride's train, heavy with golden embroidery, rustled and crackled over the gravel path, and the fan in her hand glittered with precious stones. The beautiful greyhound, which had many a time received biscuits and sweet cake from the hand of the noble lady at the window, sprung forward toward the house, then turned back to the river, and whined, and moaned in mournful yelps. The bridegroom followed to see what was the matter, and turned pale as he saw before him the cold corpse of the beautiful lady he had betrayed, with her eyes wide open, staring, as he thought, reproachfully at him.

It was from that same window, where the lady had listened to the false love vows, that the light from the doctor's evening lamp was always visible after dark; and from it the poor, forsaken one must often have gazed into the dark flowing river wherein she had laid her delicate head, rather than live to mourn over the heart she had lost.

Fifty years had passed since then and now, and the sufferer inhabited that room, tormented with similar doubts—but with this difference, thought Kathe. He is a man endowed with talents, has the world before him, and can overcome the weakness of his love by energetic work and a brilliant career. He would not think of putting an end to his life like the poor weak woman because the woman he coveted had said she would never be his!

A moment later the girl started and her cheek paled in the darkness, as she remembered Henriette's ominous remark that "any one who had seen how fascinating" Flora could be to the man she loved, would know that he would seek death rather than give her up.

He would be *obliged* to give her up now, for she had told him in bitter, cruel words that she hated him.

Kathe turned away from the bridge with a shudder, halt fearing in her nervousness to see the corpse of the miserable woman appear before her eyes, and stretch out her hands to her for help.

It was quite dark. The forest in the distance looked like a gloomy mass of black clouds, and stood so still and solemn that it was difficult to believe every branch and twig and leaf were swaying to and fro in wild confusion from the force of the wind.

The weather-cock on the roof toiled first one way, then the other. The silver poplars bent their tall heads with graceful ease as the wind swept over them, and every bush and branch in the copse near the house creaked and moaned as each gust passed through them.

With a shy, anxious glance Kathe turned toward the house. A subdued light gleamed from the windows of the guest chamber, where she had left the lovers standing by the window. The angry interview was not over yet, for the doctor was still occupying the same spot, and, as Kathe nervously peeped in, he was standing with his arms raised, as if imploring silence from Flora, who had retreated to the middle of the room. What could she have been saying to call up that drawn, haggard, yet passionate expression on the young man's face? Her own had a mocking triumphant gleam over it, that made her look like a beautiful demon in woman's form. Kathe's impulse was to spring forward, rush into the room, reproach her faithless half-sister with her cruel conduct, and do her best to comfort the man who was being so bitterly wronged. But a moment's reflection showed her how absurd such a proceeding on her part would be. She ground her teeth with rage, then a moment later trembled all over as she asked herself what would he think of her if he knew she wished to comfort him, he who had hardly spoken to her since her arrival, who had studiously treated her with ceremonious politeness, and who had quietly put aside out of his room the wild blue flowers she had inadvertently left on his writing-table not a week ago. And in spite of the shielding darkness she blushed a rosy red, and felt as if she would like to hide herself under the earth for

her momentary desire to stand by his side and express her warm sympathy for his sufferings.

She turned away, her whole frame quivering with emotion and an unaccustomed feeling of loneliness creeping over her. She did not like to go back to the garden, so she hovered about near the house, and presently found herself looking in at the kitchen window, where the widow was making some preparation for the next day's dinner. She longed to go in and offer to help her, but she dared not trust herself just now under the sharp, scrutinizing glance of the old lady's clear, searching eyes. She went round to the front door, which stood open, softly crossed the hall, and entered the widow's private sitting-room, hoping to calm and quiet herself before she had occasion to encounter any member of the household. She sat down in the easy-chair near the work-table. The ivy of the tiny alcove touched her hair as she leaned back. The sweet evening perfume of the hyacinth and narcissus filled the air around her, the canary hopped now and again from one perch to the other, twittering feebly as if tired, and trying to keep himself awake; but although the presence of the bird made her feel less lonely, she was still nervous and trembling. In vain she tried to put away from her thoughts the image the dark water outside had conjured to her brain of the dead woman who had drowned herself for love, and in spite of all her efforts, Henriette's speech, that the doctor would not survive Flora's loss, recurred to her excited brain and made her head hot and her hands cold, for surely the invalid would not have said it if she did not believe it.

Presently, through the open door communicating with the doctor's room, she saw the widow go in, light his lamp, replenish the fire, draw down the blinds, and then return to the kitchen. A few moments later the young man himself appeared on the threshold, one hand pressed to his forehead, the other hanging listlessly by his side. He evidently had no idea that a human being was watching him from the outer darkened room with a beating heart and a terrified, anxious expression contracting her young face till it appeared to double the number of her years.

Suddenly he crossed over to his writing-table, and Kathe noiselessly rose from her seat and watched his every movement. She saw him sit down under the light of the lamp which sharpened the outline of his profile, and made her see the deep flush on forehead and cheeks, and the excited gleam of his eyes. He hastily scribbled a few lines on a sheet of paper, though his hand shook visibly, folded and put it in an envelope with fever-

ish, eager haste, then wrote an address on the outside. Whose name was inscribed there? Was there anything left on earth for him to care about, that he could think of now? The note *must* be for Flora—his last farewell. Then he took up the decanter of water on the table; poured some into the crystal glass Kathe had thoughtlessly used for her flowers a few days before, and opening a drawer drew forth a tiny glass-stoppered medicine bottle. He held it to the light, as if to assure himself it was all right, then dripped into the crystal glass four or five clear colorless drops of the liquid.

Kathe had watched these proceedings with a feeling that her heart had suddenly stood still, and that she could not move if she tried; but the last drop had barely reached the water ere she regained her power of action, and with one noiseless bound stood by his side, her left hand laid on his shoulder, her right seizing the hand which held the glass just as he was putting it to his lips.

She could not utter a sound, but all she felt, all she feared was expressed in the terror-stricken face she turned toward him. She gave one horrified look into his eyes, then started back and sunk down on her knees, bowed her head in her hands from shame, and burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears.

Then, and then only, it flashed across his mind what she had imagined he was about to do, and the effort she had made to preserve his life when falsely supposing he was in the act of committing suicide. He rose, put the glass on the table, and taking one of her hands in his, pressed it warmly and whispered:

“Kathe, dear Kathe!”

He tried to look in her face, but she turned it resolutely from him, feeling ashamed in her warm, sympathizing, girlish heart that he should see the extent of her emotion. Never before had he realized the existence of such a strong, passionate nature in this reserved bright young girl.

His voice was husky, but low and tender as he said again:

“Kathe, Kathe, don't cry so!”

She gently put aside his hand, and hastily swallowing the sobs that still shook her whole frame with their force, making her round bosom heave, she said:

“I have wounded you, Herr Doctor, I know. You will never, never be able to forget that senseless act of mine. Good heavens! how could I have been so mad as to imagine that—” she checked herself and her mouth quivered; after a moment's hesitation, she added softly as she raised her liquid

brown eyes to his, with a world of passionate entreaty and self-accusation shining in their clear depths: "Don't, please, judge me so harshly; all I have gone through to-day might well upset a stronger head than mine. How could I think you meant it? How can you ever forgive me for such a thought?"

He gazed at the beautiful, quivering mouth while uttering these bitter self-accusations as if it pained him, he felt so helpless and wretched himself.

"You have not wounded me, dear Kathe," he said, presently, a smile creeping over his face to comfort her. "And what have I to do by judging you? What you could have seen in my character and actions to cause you to think that I would commit the rash act you feared, I can not imagine. I will not even think about it, one way or the other, but your mistake has caused me to live through a few moments I hope never to forget while I exist. And now calm yourself, or rather let me as a doctor prescribe for you." He took up the crystal glass from the table. "Drink some of this, it will do you good. But first perhaps I ought to explain." He hesitated, then, after a moment, went on: "I allowed myself to grow heated and angry a little while ago in the sick-room. I have nerves and hot blood like other people, yet I blame myself for giving way to my feelings while discharging my duty, and to quiet my excited nerves I came in here to get this," he touched the little bottle as he spoke; "a few drops taken in cold water soothes and calms the greatest excitement. Will you drink it?"

She lifted the crystal glass to her lips and obediently drank its contents to the last drop.

"I am very sorry you were a witness to the painful scene between Flora and myself just now," he said, slowly and emphatically, taking the empty glass out of her hand. "I regret it all the more, because by a few judicious words from me some days ago we might have avoided the discussion altogether, perhaps." He smiled such a grim forced smile that poor Kathe shuddered. "I am plagued with such confounded beggarly pride, as one of my college chums once remarked, and I am not given to talking about what I feel, hence this 'beggarly pride' has developed into a sort of Cassandra's curse on me. The world mistakes silence for incapacity, and judges accordingly. I see lots of people of easy-going natures, not troubled with my curse and satisfied with themselves, able to calculate to a nicety the position they will hold after so many years' work; but I—how I hate it all! the hollowness of the world disgusts me!" And he stamped his foot on the ground, as if crushing some venomous reptile to death. He was still

excited, still wanting in his usual calm self-possession of manner. His whole being seemed in a fever, and he began restlessly pacing to and fro, every now and then pausing for a second to look at the photograph, hung over his writing-table, of the lovely woman who had raised his passion, won his love, and now ruthlessly sought to sever herself from his life. Once she had responded to his affection, accepted his passionate devotion, and promised to be the ideal and joy and loving genius of the celebrated and far-famed young doctor's home.

But that had all passed now; he had found out by degrees that it was not his home she wished to shine in, but a brilliant, well-filled drawing-room. She had no longing now to be his wife and loved companion, but a much-admired queen of society, worshiped and lauded for her beauty, grace, and intellectual endowments. He knew all this, and yet even in answer to her prayer for freedom from her engagement, he would not give her up. Kathe looked up at him questioningly, longing to ask if he still meant to marry Flora, in spite of her acknowledgment that the love she had once given him had since changed into hatred; but with that stern expression on his face she dared not venture, and to console herself, involuntarily frowned at the smiling picture and shook her head. Then she rose and prepared to leave the room.

"Yes, you must go, I suppose," he said, standing still and looking down on the sweet young face and innocent eyes raised to his.

"The maid arrived just before I left Henriette's room, with a message from Madame Urach, begging you and Flora to join her at the villa, as she has guests to tea and can not do without her young ladies. Don't be anxious about Henriette, she is doing well, and I give you my word that there is no danger at present, so be comforted about her; I will take the tenderest care of her, you may be sure—now go; those drops have done you good already—"

She interrupted him, earnestly entreating to be allowed to remain and nurse her sick sister through the night.

"No, nothing of the sort; the maid is quite sufficient; but before you go, give me your hand, Kathe." He held out his, and she laid her slender fingers in it without a second's hesitation. "And now, whatever you hear said about me this evening, don't be led into condemning me. In a few days she will think differently," and he nodded his head without looking up at Flora's portrait, "and that will decide me. I must not, dare not reproach myself with taking advantage of this happy moment."

She looked at him, as if asking for an explanation to his words; but he merely shook his head gently, as much as to say: "Yes, so it is;"—and neither spoke.

"Good-night, good-night!" he said, presently, and letting go her hand he walked over to the table, while she went toward the door. Involuntarily she turned her head on reaching the threshold; she saw him raise the empty crystal glass to his lips; the next moment it had fallen to the floor, dashed in a hundred pieces.

When Kathe reached the sick-chamber Flora was standing ready dressed for going home. "Where have you been, child?" she asked, sharply; "grandmamma is waiting for us, and we shall get a sharp reprimand for keeping the tea standing, and all from your fault."

Kathe did not answer; throwing the wrap the maid had brought round her head, she went over to the bedside. Henriette was sleeping gently, and the fever in her cheeks seemed subdued; softly kissing the little hand on the coverlet, the young girl followed her elder half-sister into the hall. There a footman awaited the young ladies, with lantern in hand, to conduct them through the park to the villa. As they crossed the old-fashioned oaken floor, a side-door opened, and Dr. Bruck appeared, holding in his hand the hasty note he had written, which Kathe had so falsely mistaken for his farewell to the world. Her cheeks flushed painfully as she heard him ask the footman to take it to the house of one of the doctors in town, and wait for an answer. Without glancing at his face, the young girl hurried past him, and entering the kitchen, bade good-night to the widow.

A few moments later the doctor's aunt opened her eyes wide with astonishment on entering the hall to find that Flora had left her house without so much as a formal good-night or word of thanks; but she said nothing, and quietly followed her nephew into the sick-room to see that all was satisfactorily arranged for the sick girl's comfort.

Just beyond the bridge, Flora stood still and looked back at the old-fashioned house. The light from the hall shone faintly on her face, exhibiting the scornful expression which curled her mouth as she muttered aloud in ironical tones:

"Certainly the old place is to my taste—just what I should like—a hut and a heart—a husband without profession or influence—a skeleton in the cupboard, and no other income than my miserable pittance, which is barely enough to dress me decently. Never before to-day have I realized what it is to be humbled; for the first time in my life I felt oppressed

and overcome by all those poverty-stricken surroundings; and I shuddered as I realized the narrow escape I have had of being tied down to such an existence for life. God grant Henriette may get over this attack, for I shall never enter that house again—never—not even to see her again. How I have been deceived, to be sure. Good heavens! I shall never forgive myself for being so blind as to be caught by him—”

The wind blew her skirts round her knees and loosened the scarf on her head, and the water dashed in a fury against the stones at her feet, but she heeded nothing; her thoughts were concentrated on the subject of her unfortunate engagement. She went back a few steps, and stood on the boards of the old bridge.

“He says he won’t give me up in spite of all my entreaties, and all I have told him,” she said, catching hold of Kathe’s arm to prevent her going on; “you were there, you heard him say so. What a poor, mean-spirited fellow he must be, to cling so tenaciously to the letter of our engagement, when he knows the spirit of it has gone forever! He knows he has deceived me shamefully, and if he were an honorable man he would release me from our bond. Let him—let him remember for the rest of his life that a shadow rests on his honor—from this moment I am free—free!”

And snatching off her betrothal-ring, she flung it into the seething river at her feet.

“Flora, how can you!” cried Kathe, in an agonized tone, stretching out her hand as if to recover the lost ring, which had gleamed for a second in the dark air, then disappeared forever in the waters. She shuddered too, and laid her hand over her eyes as if she feared the spirit of the wronged fair widow would rise out of the river to avenge this insult to faithful love.

“Don’t be foolish, Kathe—if I had sprung in under the waves myself you couldn’t look more scared,” said Flora. “I have no doubt that many a woman has done it too from a less cause; I have simply flung away the last link of a hated chain—it was merely a thin gold hoop, ‘simple’ as everything else over there,” she added, caressing the third finger of her left hand, and nodding toward the house they had quitted; “and yet it felt as heavy as iron. Well, I’ve done it, there let it lie; a new life is before me!”

Yes, she had thrown off the yoke at last—“thrown it off at any cost,” as she had often threatened to do; and the symbol of the bond she had broken lay out of sight under the rolling waters.

When the sisters reached the villa, a man-servant met them in the hall, and informed them that several visitors had arrived, and tea was to be served in the large drawing-room.

"All the better!" remarked Flora to Kathe. "I am not at all in the humor for a lecture from grandmamma. Old Madame Steimitz will have so many scandals and so much gossip to retail, that I and my actions need not be discussed to-night. I shall just go and pour out tea for them, and then retire to my own room, to rejoice in and enjoy my new-born freedom," she added in a whisper to Kathe, as they separated at the top of the stairs.

But Kathe felt too upset to listen to the gossip going on in the drawing-room, and sent down a message of excuse for her absence on the plea of severe headache. Her heart and body both ached, and the blood coursed feverishly through her veins, as if she were going to be ill.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning the villa was in a state of commotion. Late overnight the counselor had arrived from Berlin, accompanied by two friends, and before retiring to rest had announced to the housekeeper that he had invited several friends in town to join him and his guests at breakfast the next morning.

"Now mind, the notice is short, I allow, but I expect you to do your best, and let the breakfast be first-rate. About seven or eight gentlemen will be here by ten," he added to the sleepy and astonished woman, who knew very well that a "first-rate breakfast" was not such an easy thing to prepare as her master seemed to imagine, especially when the order was given in the middle of the night, and the nearest butcher's shop was two or three miles off.

All night through Kathe had been wakeful. The wind howling round the house, added to the excitement of the day, prevented her sleeping. For hours she sat at her window, watching the swaying to and fro of the trees in the park, and trying to catch a glimpse of the gilded weather-cock over the roof of the house by the river; but in vain. Every now and again, in her anxiety about Henriette, she fancied she saw a messenger coming along the path on that side of the park, bringing, of course, the worst news of the poor little invalid.

The wind was so high she had not heard the approaching wheels of the carriage bearing her guardian and his friends to the door; and it was with a start of surprise that she saw the

servants hurrying to and fro with shaded lanterns, assisting the gentlemen to alight. She had not been looking that way at all, and when she turned her head and suddenly observed the bright light from the hall shining on the figures of the new arrivals, and glittering on the silver and gold ornaments of the harness, together with the flashing of the lanterns on the bronze and marble pillars of the portico, she drew back from her position at the window, imagining, in her astonishment at the unexpected scene below, that she herself could be seen.

She recognized the tall, elegant figure of her guardian as he sprung down from the curricie, and watched the kindly way he patted the horses' necks ere he entered the house, with a curiosity and wonder quite involuntary on her part. The whole scene was so noiseless and unexpected, it appeared more like a fairy dream than a reality; and when all was dark, and the last light had disappeared, she threw off her dressing-gown and lay down on her bed.

Early dawn was creeping in at the windows ere she closed her eyes, and then she slept till a couple of hours later than usual; so that instead of reaching the house by the river soon after six, as she intended, it was nine o'clock when she found herself in the park.

It was a beautiful, bright, clear morning; the wind had lulled at sunrise, and the air was sweet with the perfume of violets and other spring flowers.

When Kathe reached the bridge, the water, which had been so turbulent the evening before, was flowing peacefully along, glittering in the sunlight and murmuring under the worm-eaten planks with a soft, gentle gurgle that tempted the young girl to linger by its side and listen to the music of its voice.

The old house had an air of festivity and gayety about it that attracted Kathe's attention and made her wonder what could have happened to give it such a joyous appearance. The path leading up to the porch was sprinkled with the finest silver sand, and carefully raked in a pretty zigzag pattern. The table by the door was covered with a clean linen cloth, on which stood an antique vase full of lovely flowers and freshly cut evergreens.

The faithful old servant, who has been with her mistress so many years, was standing by the kitchen door, her face glowing with happiness and soap and water, her sleeves neatly pinned above her elbows, and a large white apron half hiding the cleanest and freshest of cotton skirts; and the widow herself was dressed as if she expected visitors. It was scarcely

nine o'clock, and yet she wore a rich brown silk dress in place of the usual simple stuff jacket and skirt; costly lace adorned her throat and wrists, and a cap of the same dainty material partly covered her silver hair.

"Can it be in honor of Flora?" thought Kathe, with a tightened feeling at her heart, as she remembered her half-sister's bitter words of the night before. "Can these gay preparations be meant to please Flora, who, the widow imagines, must come here again to see poor Henriette?"

But the widow said nothing about it when presently she came out into the porch and greeted the young girl with a smile. Kathe noticed that her cheeks were flushed, her eyes full of tears, and her voice trembled, but that a happy, pleased expression shone in her grand, handsome face, as, in answer to Kathe's inquiry of how the patient had passed the night, she tenderly took her young visitor in her arms, drew her to her heart, and kissed her as lovingly as a mother kisses her child, and informed her that Henriette was no worse, but, if anything, slightly better.

A few moments later Kathe entered the sick-room, blushing and smiling at this unusual expression of affection on the widow's part. She found the maid combing out the long fair hair of the invalid, whose small thin face, sharp cheek bones, with dark rings round her large eyes, looked wan and ghastly in the morning light. Her voice was stronger, certainly; but she was restless and fretful.

She told Kathe, with kindling eyes, how good and kind *her* doctor had been, how he had sat up all night, how he had given her medicine and refreshment with his own hands, and eased her aching, burning head with his cool fingers, and how he had gone to lie down now for an hour to get a little sleep before going into town to see his patients. Presently, when the long hair was put in order, face and hands refreshed with water, and her pillows smoothed, she begged Kathe to go back to the villa and fetch a book she had promised to lend to the widow to read.

"I want it at once, Kathe dear. I told her she should have it—she is so good to me—more kind than I can tell you; and Flora has it, I know it is in her room." Then she added, fretfully: "Don't let Flora or grandmamma come here. I don't want them—they worry me; but if Flora should come, then tell her not to stay long."

She little guessed how needless was the precaution, or what sad and painful consequences had followed her feverish wanderings of the evening before. Kathe could scarcely look her

in the face as she remembered all that had passed, and she was very glad when the invalid urged her to go for the book at once, and to bring back with her several things she named from off the writing-table in her room.

On her road across the park Kathe could think of nothing but the sad havoc twelve hours' fever and suffering had made in Henriette's usually thin, pale face. The sunken features, death-like pallor, and feverish eyes of the poor little invalid haunted her. Full of vague fears and anxieties as to the result of yesterday's accident on Henriette's delicate frame, she was absently crossing the hall to mount the stairs on her arrival at the villa, when her attention was attracted by the brilliant appearance of the breakfast-table, seen through the open door of the dining-room. The glittering silver, costly china and glass, and exquisite damask cloth and serviettes formed a fitting center to the Oriental walls, marble floors, and exotic plants of the room and winter garden beyond. On a magnificent carved stand at the side several bottles of rare and old wines were conspicuous for their grim and dust-covered appearance.

She stood still for a second, fascinated by the beauty and elegance of the room thus prepared with every luxury for the delight and pleasure of the counselor's guests, then shuddered and turned away as Henriette's death-like countenance rose up before her mental vision. Slowly mounting the stairs, she gathered together the few things Henriette required from her room, and then wended her steps toward Mme. Urach's boudoir, to pay her usual dutiful morning respects to the old lady, and inform her of how her granddaughter had passed the night. Hesitating for a moment on the last stair, as she recognized the postman's voice in the hall, she leaned over the carved balustrade, and heard one of the men-servants remark:

"Now, really, here is this packet come back again for the third time! I'm sick of the thing. Our young lady must think I've nothing to do but to carry it into town. She'll be sure to send it somewhere else to-day. I'm half inclined to put it in the kitchen fire to have done with it."

"What's in it?" asked another.

"Oh! only a lot of paper on which Fraulein Flora's scribbled, as big as you please, something about women's rights. I saw the title when I stood by her a few days ago, while she wrote the fresh address. What can such as she know about—"

Kathe hurried to the boudoir and knocked, but the maid who opened the door told her that her mistress had a visitor—one of the ladies from the court; so the young girl turned

away and retraced her steps to the hall to fetch the book from Flora's sitting-room.

Her heart beat fast as she opened the door to enter. She had no desire to see her half-sister. The anger and indignation she had felt overnight toward her for her ungenerous and cruel conduct to the doctor took possession of her again, and her face flushed painfully as she said: "Good-morning" in a rather-constrained tone.

Flora stood at the table in no very amiable mood, and her cheeks flushed also as she returned her young half-sister's greeting.

But it was not regret or shame of last night's scene that caused the angry color to mount to her brow. A letter she had just finished reading and flung into the waste-paper basket proved that, and she hastily covered over the packet Kathe had noticed in the servant's hand not five minutes ago and which now lay on the table beside several other letters and papers.

"You have seen Henriette, have you? She is going on all right, I hear. I sent down at eight o'clock to inquire how she was. What a thoughtless man Moriz is! Fancy his sending me a note early this morning, which he wrote in the night, saying that he wished to introduce his friends to grandmamma and me before their breakfast. You have heard he ordered a grand breakfast for himself and friends at ten? Just as if the world would stand still if we did *not* see these men! Grandmamma won't be pleased, I know. How do you like my toilet?"

"As usual, you look lovely."

Flora smiled. If what is said is true, that women dress themselves according to the humor of the moment, then Flora must have awoke this morning in a very happy frame of mind, for she was dressed from head to foot in a soft shimmering blue that was very becoming both to her complexion and figure. Even her hair was ornamented with a dainty little knot of the same color. But whatever humor she had been in when she made her toilet, the expression on her beautiful face now was one of discontent and irritation. She looked thoroughly bad-tempered, and her smile, in answer to Kathe's exclamation of admiration, was forced and constrained and more mechanical than voluntary. She made no reference to last night's conversation. On the third finger of her left hand two small diamonds flashed where the pale gold betrothal-ring had formerly shone.

At Kathe's request she turned to her book-shelves for the desired volume.

"Surely Henriette is not allowed to read?" she asked.

"Doctor Bruck would forbid it, of course. No, the book is for his aunt," replied Kathe, quietly, as she held out her hand for the volume.

Flora's mouth curled into a sneer, and her eyes flashed displeasure and anger at Kathe for daring to utter Dr. Bruck's name in her presence. Kathe had opened the door and was leaving the room when she came face to face with her guardian, the counselor, who looked handsomer than usual in his gray morning suit, and had an excited air about him as he hurried forward, exclaiming:

"There you are, Kathe! Don't go. I must first convince myself that you are safe and well."

He half pushed, half led her back into the room in a playful manner, shut the door, and flinging his hat on to a chair, said:

"Now, for God's sake, tell me the truth about your hairbreadth escape yesterday. Anton gave me a confused account of it while I was dressing, but no one said a word to me about it last night for fear it might disturb my rest, for which consideration I am not thankful. What will be thought of me and my heedless conduct? There is Henriette lying dangerously ill, and I giving a champagne breakfast to a lot of fellows in my own house! What on earth is the truth of the affair? A crowd of wretches attacked you?"

"Not *us*—but me specially, Moriz," said Flora. "Henriette and Kathe had to suffer simply because they were with me. I am sorry I have to say it; but I must reproach you with being greatly to blame for the attack. You ought to have acted differently at the first sign of discontent among them. Such a rabble as those workmen ought to have a firm, decided, masterful hand over them. But you from the very beginning dallied about your duty, and were so weak—"

"Weak in giving way to you and your grandmother, if you like," interrupted her brother-in-law, white with anger. "You neither of you gave me any peace till I had withdrawn my promise about the land—and thus unnecessarily irritated the hands. Bruck was right—"

"Spare me *there!*" exclaimed Flora, her face flushing with rage. "If you have no other authority to mention but him, then—"

The counselor drew nearer his angry sister-in-law, and looking into her flashing eyes, with no little astonishment expressed in his own, asked, earnestly:

"Flora, do you mean it? are you still so hostile toward him?"

"Do you think I am such a weak-headed fool as to change my opinions as often as one does one's dress?" she asked, bitingly.

"No, not so; but isn't it rather too daring for you to defy the world's—"

"What is the world to me?" she broke in with a loud laugh. "The world—society! Will you tell me then how it would be possible to make 'society' accept your much-to-be-pitied protégé?"

The counselor seized her hand, and for a moment appeared speechless from surprise.

"Ha! how is that possible?" he gasped rather than exclaimed. "Don't you know—"

"What don't I know?" she broke in again impatiently as he hesitated, and she frowned ominously and lightly stamped her foot.

Before he had time to reply the door opened, and Mme. Urach entered the room. She had on a violet-colored silk dress, but whether or not it was the color that ill became her, or yesterday's excitement had given her a bad night, whichever it was she looked haggard and worn and very much distressed.

The counselor hurried toward her and respectfully kissing her hand regretted he had not been able to wish her "good-morning" half an hour before. He had been to her boudoir, but was informed that she was engaged, and could not receive him.

"Yes, Fraulein von Berneck was with me, expressing her sympathy for the sad state Henrietta is in. She was horrified at hearing of the attack on Flora," the old lady replied. "We shall have a trying day I expect, for all in town are astonished and excited at the news, and our friends will be sure to come to inquire if it is really true."

She sunk down in the nearest easy-chair with a lassitude and want of energy that was not usual with her, as she went on:

"The lady-in-waiting had other reasons for her early visit. I know her well; she is one of those who love to be the first to impart startling news, not caring or stopping to consider if in so doing she was betraying a court secret. Imagine, she came to congratulate me privately on the good fortune which is to befall our house—and I hardly know if I ought to weep or rejoice over it! Good heavens, what a dilemma it has put me in! It is really shameful, too, the way our court is proving the

truth of the old proverb about ingratitude, instead of giving a good example to the contrary. You know how my poor old friend Bar has sacrificed himself to serve the court, and yet now he is to be overlooked and ignored. He is still strong and well, and yet they are pensioning him off."

"And is that what Fraulein von Berneck came to congratulate you about?" asked Flora, angrily.

"Of course not *that*, my dear," answered her grandmother with more energy. "Wonderful things are happening, Flora. Who would have believed an hour ago that Doctor Bruck would be appointed physician to the prince?"

"Mere court scandal and gossip! I wonder what next their inventive heads will hit upon," laughed Flora. "Court physician indeed! And you listened to such nonsense, grandmother, and let that old tittle-tattler congratulate you?"

"Now really it is hardly possible to believe that civilized beings living close to a capital town don't read the newspapers!" cried the counselor, clapping his hands together. "You don't mean to say you have no idea of what is going on? and I came back a day sooner simply on that account; I could not stay away for joy. The newspapers are full of the wonderful operation Bruck performed in L—— the other day. You must know the hereditary prince was at L—— studying there; he was thrown from his horse, and hurt his head so seriously that none of the doctors dared undertake the necessary operation, not even Professor H—— himself. Then some one suddenly remembered that Bruck had treated a similar case in the late war, and to every one's astonishment brought his patient successfully through the operation. So he was telegraphed for to the prince—"

"What, *your* Doctor Bruck, your protégé?" interrupted Flora, trying to laugh, but her pale lips seemed turned into stone, and her whole face turned white as death.

"Certainly, *my* Bruck, as I am only too proud to call him," replied her brother-in-law good-naturedly, too decidedly glad at the happy turn things had taken to notice Flora's sneer. Long ago he had ceased to feel any scruples of conscience relative to his silence on the subject of the late miller's death; he had almost ceased to think about it, for he was a true son of modern days—an egotist—who in the choice between "he" or "I" never hesitated for a second to pronounce in favor of "I," while he was glad that the clouds which had lately hung heavy and dark over the young doctor's career were clearing away, and that sunshine was streaming on his head again.

"Besides," he went on, "a pamphlet of his is making a great sensation among the faculty. It appears he has some theory of his own about operations in general which he wants adopted. It is by no means to be denied that Bruck has a grand career open before him."

"Who would believe it!" remarked Flora in a strangely subdued tone. Doubt and mistrust visible in every feature, she looked for a moment like a gambler risking his last hope on the card he was playing. "You don't convince me, Moriz, with all that nonsense; either there is some mistake in the name, or the whole story is a trumped-up affair."

As his sister-in-law uttered these bitter words the counselor forgot his usual courteous manner before ladies, and not only stamped his foot in a passion but turned on his heel and walked away.

Meanwhile Mme. Urach was anxiously watching her granddaughter's countenance. She could thoroughly understand how bitterly she must regret having despised and slandered a man who had proved himself worthy of honor and respect. It was certainly a sad defeat for the proud woman, but the well-experienced worldly dame tried to make the best of it for her grandchild.

"It's of no use disbelieving the affair, Flora," she said. "In the end you will be forced to accept it as a fact. I, for my part—wonderful as it all seems—don't doubt it for a moment. The Duke of D—— is the young prince's uncle. I don't wonder that he is thankful and happy at his nephew's escape. Yesterday evening I saw the grand Darmstadt decoration lying on Doctor Bruck's table."

"And you tell me that now, grandmamma? now for the first time?" cried Flora, as if mad. "Oh! why didn't you speak of it last night? why did you keep silence about it so long?"

"Keep silence?" repeated the old lady, angrily shaking her head with a nervous movement not unusual with ladies of her age. "You impertinent girl! I should like to know what else kept me from mentioning the fact, except that for months past we have hardly dared mention Bruck's name in your presence without a scene. I have avoided as much as possible—"

"If my conduct had your sanction, *chère grandmère*—"

"I avoided this mention of his name because it always upsets me to witness outbursts of feeling. You have been his bitterest opponent, have judged and condemned him more severely than his enemies, and the slightest attempt to exonerate him always puts you in a passion. Moriz and Henrietta

could tell a tale about that, and haven't you even now showed the scoffing way you take with Moriz whenever he tries to screen the young man? How have you just received the good news of his advancement?"

The old lady must have been terribly put out to refer in this open manner to Flora's disgraceful behavior to her lover during the past few months. It was so contrary to her usual habit of silence as regards her family's faults before others that the haughty girl was dumb from astonishment. Standing by the window with her back to her grandmother, the quick heaving of her bosom showed how she was struggling with herself to keep her feelings within bounds.

"Tell me *when* I ought to have imparted to you my discovery of the order?" the old lady went on presently. "Yesterday evening, before my guests, when you barely remained half an hour in the drawing-room, though you knew I wished you to help me to entertain them? or in the doctor's house earlier in the afternoon, where I did not see you for a moment alone, and where you sat in your corner looking the picture of disgust at your lover's poor surroundings?"

"You will be kind enough to remember, dear grandmamma, that that troubled you as well as me; the same thing concerns us both, as you know very well."

"My dear, it is of no use talking to you, you turn and twist everything to please yourself, and you have very little respect for truth where a falsehood suits your purpose," retorted the old lady with an impatient movement of her hand which scattered several papers lying on the table. Endeavoring to gather them together, her eye lighted on the packet returned to Flora by the postman.

"Ah! has that article found its way back again after its zigzag journeyings hither and thither?" she exclaimed, pointing to the packet. "I should have thought you would have left it in peace in the waste-basket long ago. This continual sending to and fro, and the refusal of the publishers to accept the work, would be unbearable to me. What a storm there would be if one of us were to venture to protest against your possessing talent and power enough to write, and yet every month or so you allow it to be told you by—"

"Don't excite yourself, dear grandmamma! You can make a mistake like other people, sometimes," interrupted Flora with a speaking glance at Kathe, who had been forced into hearing similar statements made the evening before. "You are not yourself this morning, you are upset at the thought of losing your influential friend at court. I pity you, dear grand-

mamma, because I don't think Doctor Bruck will come to be an intermedium between you and the royal family; not even for love of me would he retail scandal. But sorry as I am for you, I don't see why I need be sacrificed to please any one, so I shall take myself off till you are in a better frame of mind."

And gathering her papers together, she swept across the floor and vanished behind the door of her dressing-room.

"She is a very peculiar girl," said the old lady, with a sigh. "She doesn't take after her mother, who was softness and sweetness itself. Her father spoiled her by allowing her to head his table when she was quite a young girl, almost a child. I told him several times he was doing her harm, but one might as well have spoken to the wind. You know, Moriz, how obstinate he could be when once he had taken an idea into his head."

Kathe moved toward the door to leave the room, for it pained her to hear her dead father reproached for Flora's faults, however much those faults might have been encouraged by his own mode of bringing her up, and reproached, too, by his mother-in-law, whose presence in his house he had good reasons for refusing.

"You are so pale, Kathe, and look so wan and tired, I think you must be suffering from yesterday's excitement. Poor little one!" said her guardian, following her and taking her hand as he glanced kindly in her face.

"I have noticed her change color at a mere nothing for several days past, and she is so serious too," remarked Mme. Urach, quickly, before the young girl had time to speak. "I know what ails her; she is homesiek, and no wonder, too; she is accustomed to the quiet, regular life of a simple family where she is made much of, and where, of course, every wish and whim of the rich pupil becomes law. It is quite impossible for us to indulge her to the same extent; our household is on a different scale, we live in the world, and I have no doubt that she feels the constant society around her here is too much and too exciting; am I right, dear child?" she asked, stroking the girl's cheek softly.

"I am sorry to contradict you, madame—but I must say no," answered Kathe, in her ringing young voice, drawing back her head as if she objected to the caress. "I was not made much of, nor were my whims and fancies regarded as law in the house of my dear kind governess. I was brought up very strictly, I can assure you—and since I have been rich"—and she laughed with a mischievous twinkle in her eye—"I think my faults have not been condoned so easily as they used

to be. And I am not so unaccustomed to society as you imagine, madame. Our rooms are so small in Dresden, we can not have many whist-tables—but we had charming evenings without cards, when the professors of the academy and other friends would enliven us with their delightful conversation: or when some celebrated musician would come to us, and be compelled to play on my poor worn-out piano.” Her lips quivered with suppressed merriment, but there was a decided shade of sarcasm discernible in the tones of her voice, as she drew up her figure and looked straight at Mme. Urach. “There is one thing I am thankful for,” she went on, “and that is, that I was taught not to think of myself when another’s comfort and happiness were at stake. Don’t be shocked, Moriz!” she added, facing round fearlessly on her guardian. “Let me stay on here some time longer, will you, for Henriette’s sake?”

“Bless me—I have no other desire or wish than that you should remain,” he replied so fervently that Kathe was astonished.

Mme. Urach was standing by the table turning over the leaves of a book, apparently more interested in what she saw there than in the young girl’s remarks.

“Of course you shall stay here as long as you like, my dear, but we must not let you sacrifice yourself to your affection. Nanni takes all possible care of Henriette—she is accustomed to her delicate state, too—besides, there is my maid to assist her, if needful. You can go home, dear child, and be at ease about Henriette; she will be well attended to.”

“Let the motive be what it may, grandmother, it is enough that Kathe wishes to remain with us,” remarked the counselor, quickly, still looking earnestly at the bright young girl at his side, as he added: “Besides, I was so sure you were going to stay some time among us, Kathe, that I ordered your new pianoforte—ha! and a splendid instrument it is too—worth twenty such gimcracks as that one in the drawing-room, and I ordered it to be sent here direct.”

“But, Moriz, how could you?” cried the girl, in a startled voice. “Dresden is and always will be my home—it ought to have gone there—I only visit here, you know;” then laughing, she added, merrily: “Am I to carry a grand piano about with me as part of my luggage?”

“I fancy you will think differently in reference to Dresden some day,” he replied, with a slight, expressive smile. “Anyway, the instrument arrives to-morrow, and will be placed in your room for the present.”

Mme. Urach closed the book in her hand with a sharp snap, but she spoke in her usual indifferent manner.

"You are making arrangements, Moriz, which will upset several plans of mine, though of course that won't matter very much. But I shall be obliged to write to Baroness von Steiner to-day, and postpone her intended visit."

"I don't see why."

"The room Kathe occupies now was intended for her companion. You know she never goes anywhere without her."

The counselor shrugged his shoulders.

"I am very sorry, but naturally Kathe, my ward, remains where she is."

Opposition from him! He dared to look her coolly in the face, and announce that Baroness von Steiner must yield to Kathe—he who formerly moved heaven and earth and considered nothing a sacrifice to obtain guests of rank and position to visit at his house!

The old lady bit her lip and raised her brows.

"I will write at once to my friend," she said, "and explain the unfortunate position I am in. I regret it, I must say, because, of course, I could not foresee what would happen."

She rose, gathered her skirts together, and was leaving the room when Kathe sprung forward and detained her.

"No, no, madame, you must not do it. You can't be in earnest, Moriz," she said, turning to her guardian. "You can't really mean to make madame's guests give way to a young girl like me? It must not be. Besides, haven't I a house of my own? I will take up my quarters at the Mill-house as soon as Baroness von Steiner arrives."

"That I can't allow, my dear Kathe; indeed I can't," replied the old lady, severely. The proud haughtiness of her nature flashed in her eyes as she went on: "I am not a very severe person—your mother never had any reason to complain of unfriendliness on my side—but the intimate relations that would ensue between the Mill-house and the villa I could not tolerate—the running to and fro would vex me to death; besides, I would not have such a thing known to my friend for anything; she would be simply horrified. Moriz, you will find me in the blue drawing-room when you wish to introduce your friends." And with a slight inclination of the head, she left the room.

The counselor waited till the rustling of her silk skirts had ceased in the distance and the door of her boudoir was sharply closed ere he turned to Kathe and with a light laugh remarked:

"You have had quite a lecture! The old lady lets her claws be felt in spite of her soft velvet paws—doesn't she? But she won't be able to do it much longer. Poor old dame, she has had a heavy blow, and feels it, but she is harmless now. With her old friend Bar's retirement from court, her influence there and in society is at an end." He rubbed his hands with delight. "Don't you yield an inch to her, Kathe, dear; you have more right in my house than any one else—remember that!"

A servant entered as he was speaking, and announced that his friends awaited him in the drawing-room. Snatching up his hat he offered Kathe his arm, but she slipped past him and went out into the hall.

Her guardian's manner and tone toward herself did not please her at all, neither did she admire him for laughing at the old lady as soon as her back was turned, when in her presence he was almost subserviently respectful. The young girl felt uncomfortable, and it was with a sigh of intense relief that she turned her back on the red-curtained room, and wended her way through the fresh sweet morning air to the house by the river.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Kathe returned to the doctor's house, she found the sick-room furnished with the same simple furniture it had had when Henriette was first carried in there and laid on the bed.

Dr. Bruck had yielded to the sick girl's passionate desire to have the things from the villa removed out of her sight, so they were piled together and placed in a corner of the wide hall. The green damask *fauteuil*, elegant fire-screen, and costly carpet—even the gold-bordered washing apparatus—had been banished from the room, and the simple stone-ware old-fashioned screen and chintz-covered arm-chair put back in their places. The tiny fountain freshened the air with water supplied from a red earthen basin, and on a table by the bedside stood Henriette's canary cage, which had been fetched from the villa at her express wish. Her favorite bird flew in and out of the cage door as unconcernedly as if he had been at home, hopped over the bed, picked bits of sugar from the little invalid's weak fingers, and perched on the curtain-rings over the windows, to the delight and amusement of his mistress.

At noon the maid had been dispatched to the villa to take a few hours' rest, the widow undertaking to watch over her invalid guest for the rest of the day. She still wore the rich

brown silk dress and dainty lace; but to avoid the rustling of her skirt against the furniture, she had covered it with a large linen apron, fastened around her waist.

When Kathe reached Henriette's bedside, she found that her half-sister was already aware of the happy change in the young doctor's prospects. It appears that Nanni had seen one of the gentlemen of the court arrive in the hall soon after Kathe's departure for the villa; had seen him greet the widow with a warmth and respect that raised the curiosity of the serving-woman, who had immediately gone to her young mistress and told her of the unusual and early visit, and that the gentleman was talking with the doctor and his aunt in their sitting-room. As soon as the visitor had driven off in his carriage, Henriette's impatience and curiosity got the better of her; she sent for Dr. Bruck, and questioned and cross-questioned him about his noble visitor, till he had satisfied her by telling her the whole history of the successful operation, and its happy results.

"They expected the visit this morning, so that is why the dear, dear old lady is dressed in her best, Kathe; doesn't she look nice?" asked Henriette, later in the afternoon, when the two girls were alone.

The doctor had gone to the palace to have an interview with the prince, and his aunt was busy in some household duty in her own room. The invalid was propped up in bed, her pale wan face radiant with heartfelt joy and happiness. She had been forbidden to speak, for the cry of delight she had uttered, when earlier in the day the doctor had informed her of his good-fortune, had exhausted her so completely that he had feared a return of yesterday's hemorrhage. For hours she had been obedient, had hardly opened her lips, and had refrained from asking either him or his aunt a single question relative to the subject uppermost in her mind; but now that she was alone with Kathe, and the widow's warning finger was no longer there to stop the words which rose to her lips, she started up in bed, and after telling Kathe all she knew, and before Kathe had time to answer her question about the widow, she became suddenly very excited, and said:

"Where is Flora?"

"You know your grandmamma has sent over several times to say that she has such a constant succession of visitors, she can't escape away just yet, though she is longing to come and see you, dear."

"Grandmamma, indeed!" exclaimed Henriette, impatiently jerking herself on her pillows. "Who wants her? Let her

remain where she is. I spoke of Flora." Then, clasping her hands together and leaning toward her sister, she added: "Isn't that a splendid justification for him, Kathe! How I thank God I have lived to see and know it! How I hope he won't go to the villa on his return from the palace. I must see him and Flora meet for the first time after this grand news—I must. I do so long to see her humiliate herself before him—I—"

"Henriette, don't talk so much; you will excite yourself," Kathe entreated.

"Let me alone; I *will* talk," she went on, angrily. "If the doctor knew what suffering he inflicts on me by obliging me to hold my tongue, he would let me talk." Then, leaning on her elbow, and passing her hand through her thick, fair hair, she asked: "Do you remember, Kathe, how Flora sneered at the doctor when he returned from that journey lately and told him to his face he had only been amusing himself for the few days he was absent?" Her eyes grew excited and feverish, and had the same wild expression in them as in her delirium of the evening before.

Kathe tried to soothe and quiet her, but it was of no use.

"Don't you remember, too, how angry she was with Moriz because he suggested Doctor Bruck had gone to see a patient? No, no; if she were to beg on her knees for forgiveness, it could not atone for her malice and wickedness to that man! Her conduct has been shameful—shameful! I would give anything to be able to see into her heart just now! What humiliation for her! She deserves it, doesn't she? I should think she won't be able to look us in the face when next we meet—or him either. Do you think she will? When will she come here?"

Kathe was silent by the bedside, as silent and still as if she had been the culprit. Her angry and indignant invalid sister had no idea that Flora's feet were not likely to pass the threshold of the doctor's house again; neither did she know that Flora had herself snapped the last link of the chain which bound her to her lover, by throwing the simple gold hoop which formed her engagement-ring into the foaming waves under the bridge. And who was to tell her this? Who was to let her know the sad consequences of her last night's half-delirious ravings?

"Why don't you speak, Kathe?" Henriette grumbled. "Have you cold blood in your veins, that you are so little interested in this affair? Of course, you don't know us very well yet; and you can't be expected to feel as deeply about the affair

as I do. You have seen the doctor so seldom, and have hardly spoken ten words to him; so I suppose he does not interest you. But you have seen Flora's detestable behavior, have heard the heartless way she has spoken to and of her lover; and surely you must be glad that she is punished—that justice is being meted out to her?"

Kathe looked up, and her flashing eyes and the rush of blood to her cheeks and brow, dying even the snow-white throat, were proof positive that the blood within her was warm and passionate.

"And if her punishment is carried out to the full, and Flora has to acknowledge her falseness and heartlessness, what then? What good will that do to the injured man?" she asked, in a low, constrained tone. "Flora has expressed aversion and dislike to the doctor, you say. Well, his being raised to a position at court can't possibly make her love for him return."

"Certainly, without doubt it will. Flora has such a pitiful ambitious disposition," replied the invalid, in a bitter, contemplative tone. "And he? You will see that the very first attempt she makes at reconciliation, he will forget the past as if it had never happened."

She shut her eyes and shook her head for a moment ere adding, in a whisper: "If only love were not such an unfathomable enigma! He loves her as much as ever. How else can one account for his strange toleration of all her willful, wicked caprices? If Satan himself looked out through her beautiful face, and her hands were raised to strike him, he would still love her, and take her hands and tenderly caress them."

After awhile she half hid her pale face on the pillows—the bitter smiles playing round the corners of her colorless, drawn lips were painful to see—and said, in a distinct voice:

"If she offers reconciliation, he will accept it with joy, and be as happy as he was some months ago; so the best thing for all of us to do is to ignore her late bad behavior, and never allow it to be referred to again among us."

Kathe did not reply. No answer seemed to be expected from her by the invalid, who was impatiently awaiting the momentary return of the young doctor, whose happiness she was so anxious to see secured. What if Flora did not come, and it was at last necessary to tell her that the faithless bride had, by one rash act, put a summary ending to the long torment she had been lately inflicting on her devoted lover? "Then you will cease to mention—never come near our house," Henriette

had moaned out in delirium the evening before to the young doctor.

Sitting there by the bedside, Kathe had time to revolve in her mind all she had seen and heard about this unhappy engagement: the strange conduct of the bride-elect, her chilling neglect and openly expressed contempt for her lover, ending with the scene of the evening before, when she had earnestly entreated to be allowed to withdraw from her engagement and be a free woman.

Now that was all changed. She was to be forgiven for her past neglect, and thanked for a reconciliation, which, if she sought at all, would be merely to gratify her ambition, and not for the sake of the peace and happiness she had it in her power to bestow. And he—would he take her back to his heart on such terms? Certainly he would; for had he not refused to give her up, even though she had said that she hated him? In her heart Kathie felt angry with the doctor for being so weak where his love was concerned. Why could he not have more pride than to allow himself to be treated in such a way?

For a moment she felt as if she could weep for his folly; but the next she had swallowed the indignant tears ere they rose to her eyes, angry with herself for indulging in such a feeling at all. What could it matter to her what he did? She had no right or business to think about it, whichever way it turned; and if the wedding really did take place at Whitsuntide, the sooner she set about embroidering the sofa-cushion she intended as a bridal present, the better.

Her thoughts were broken in upon by the widow's entrance with a branch of syringa in her hand, which she laid on the sheets and smilingly told Henriette was a greeting for her from the bright spring morning outside. Then, taking up her knitting, and going round to where Kathe sat, she said, gently:

"You look pale, my love. Go into the garden for awhile and breathe the fresh sweet air—it will do you good—for an hour. Yesterday's excitement has driven the color from your cheeks, and that won't do. Young faces were meant to be rosy and bright."

Nothing loath, the young girl obeyed the kindly meant order, put on her hat and went out into the garden. The widow was right, the fresh air and sunshine did her good, she breathed more freely, and the tight pressure on her bosom felt relieved by the time she had reached the quaint old bridge. But she did not cross it. She stood still for awhile, gazing at the beauty of the scene around. From the beautiful blue heavens overhead her eyes wandered to the glistening waters.

at her feet, the fresh green grass beyond, the budding trees near at hand. On one side the dark, somber forest, on the other meadows and fields, with the roofs and windows of a distant village gleaming in the merry sunlight.

Then her attention was attracted by the twittering of birds around the wooden loft near the house, and she saw the first swallows of the year flying in and out of the openings, evidently intent on building their nests. Many a time, as a child, had she lain on the grass by the river, and watched the coming and going of these spring birds: but then the house was deserted and shut up, and a human being rarely disturbed the quiet and loneliness of the place by his presence. Now the old house was inhabited, smoke issued from its chimneys, windows and doors were open, life, with its accompanying passions and interests, sorrows and joys, had taken possession of the place, and all seemed changed; even the girl herself, who was standing by the bridge, was no longer the child she had been seven years ago. For the first time it struck her that the place which had always strangely fascinated her ever since she could remember, had for a few short weeks belonged to her, as her grandfather's heiress. The sum which the doctor had given for it belonged to her, and was lying side by side with other rolls of precious papers in the new iron safe her guardian had told her contained her immense fortune. Why this thought brought the blood to her cheeks and made her heart beat she could not tell, but so it was. She did not stop to examine the hen-coop, which she now observed for the first time in a corner near the loft, but wandered on through the orchard till she came round to the other side of the house and reached the hawthorn hedge which formed the boundary of the little property. Here she noticed several bits of shining glass lying about, and all at once it flashed through her mind that they were the remains of the crystal glass she had drank from the evening before, when the doctor ordered her to take the soothing draught. Burning tears rushed to her eyes as the remembrance of that scene came back to her. She blamed herself bitterly for letting her fears and anxieties run away with her judgment, and the longer she thought over it the more angry she felt with herself for imagining for one second that the doctor was capable of the weakness she in her foolishness had imputed to him. She felt sure he would not be able to forget it, and that, for a time at least, he would avoid her, and cease to smile if she were unavoidably thrown into his society.

Henriette would soon be able to return to the villa, and the intercourse between the great house and the house by the river

would be ended. For after all that had happened last evening—however much the doctor might insist upon his rights—surely if Flora did not advance upon the hoped-for reconciliation by a visit to her sick sister, he would have to acknowledge that his engagement with her was annulled. Or would he do as Henriette feared, and visit the villa on his return from the palace, to inform his haughty lady-love of the golden change in his prospects?

Such thoughts as these were passing through her mind as she wended her way by the river, when she heard a loud noise in the vicinity of the loft, which caused her to retrace her steps to see what it was all about. In the inclosure around the loft the watch-dog had broken loose and was wildly careering after the screaming hens. As soon as she could, Kathe caught at his chain. Laughing heartily at the scattered hens, and the noise and confusion among them, she dragged the dog back to his kennel. But he, as soon as he discovered that he was to be refastened to the post, tried to release himself from her grasp by pulling at the chain, crouching down and refusing to move; and finally, when he found that such resistance was of no use, by barking and showing his teeth in angry defiance. He was a good-sized animal of savage nature and sinewy build, and might have attacked Kathe in his anger if she had not had the presence of mind to seize him with her arm round his neck, while with her free hand she slipped the chain quickly over the strong hook on the post, and then sprung nimbly back out of his way and beyond his reach, but not before the enraged animal had snapped at her dress and torn a portion of it to ribbons.

“Brute! lie still!” she commanded, and took up her skirt to see the extent of the damage done by his white, glistening teeth.

Presently she heard rapid steps crossing the rustic bridge. She knew it was the doctor without turning her head. She hoped he did not observe her, and that he would go straight on into the house, for if he had been to the villa on his return from the palace, he would naturally prefer to be alone, perhaps even be in such a thoughtful humor that he would not notice her at all.

He did not enter the house, but turned off to the left, and came direct toward her, and as soon as he reached the hen-yard held up his stick threateningly over the growling, angry dog's head, and obliged him to retire into his kennel and lie down. After which he fastened the chain more securely to the post as he observed:

"I must have the brute removed from this; he is so savage and disobedient. He does as much harm by frightening peaceable people as he does good by keeping off trespassers. You managed to make him obey you this time, but I think you are so conscious of your own strength that you are a little rash where other girls would be timid; don't you think so yourself?"

He spoke earnestly, almost as if he wished to reprove her for what she had just done.

"Oh, I have my moments of fear and timidity just like other girls," she replied, frankly. "As a rule I am terribly afraid of strange dogs, and get out of their way quickly enough; but at a critical moment inborn weakness must not be allowed to sway one's actions, so I press my teeth firmly together and go to work; perhaps it is that which makes you think me rash."

The doctor was not looking at her as she spoke, but watching the flight of a swallow over his head, nevertheless he smiled, and Kathe fancied it was a smile of doubt and disbelief.

"You doubt what I say, do you?" she asked, half in earnest, half in fun. "Do you know that it is not so very long since I was afraid to move about in the dark." Her eyes gleamed with malicious delight, and the dimples in her cheeks deepened as she went on: "I suppose you can imagine that in such an old place as the Mill-house hobgoblins and ghosts abounded in every corner and cranny; that lordly ancestors occasionally stepped down from their frames on the walls and walked about distributing corn, and that the ghosts of millers, who once upon a time kept back grain that should have been sold, were wont to roam through the scenes of their former existence. Of course I heard all these things, and I believed in them as firmly as if I had been brought up in a Thuringian hut. But as neither papa nor Fraulein Lucas shared in my belief, and if they had found out I was afraid would have scolded Susanne for repeating the legends to me, there was nothing for it but to cure myself of my fear. I was ashamed of it too; so whenever anything was wanted I ground my teeth together, and without a second's hesitation went upstairs in the pitch dark to fetch it."

"How is it that if you are accustomed to school your own feelings so well, and keep them under control, you were so easily persuaded into believing a man capable of a weak and cowardly act?"

A burning blush spread over her face as he spoke, but she drew back her head and said, quietly, though in a somewhat haughty tone:

"You pardoned my thoughtlessness yesterday."

He shook his head deprecatingly.

"There was nothing in my remark to make you doubt that I meant what I said last night, when I assured you you had not offended me," he replied, involuntarily lowering his rich, musical voice, as if he did not intend the world to hear of this episode between himself and the young girl at his side. "I merely meant I should like very much to know the foundation for your momentary suspicion of me."

Kathe did not answer at once; her eyes had resumed their usual bright, downy expression, a smile hovered on her lips, and the small childish face looked almost too young for the full-rounded womanly figure, as in a demuréd voice, and pointing to the corner window, she began:

"Once upon a time a lovely noble lady lived in that—"

"What, that romantic history that all the old women relate over their spinning-wheels! The tragic fate of the lovely lady caused you to imagine—"

"No, not entirely. Henriette made me anxious, and—"

"Henriette is ill; constant suffering has shaken her nerves and made her morbid. But you are strong and healthy."

"I know I am, but there are things which youth and inexperience naturally prevent one from being able to judge by common rules—"

"As for instance—love," he interrupted with a sudden shy glance at the girl.

"Yes," she said, simply.

He stooped his tall head, and began mechanically driving his stick against a square slab of sandstone which stood in the center of the grassy plot opposite the porch. When Kathe was a child, she had been wont to use this stone as a table on which to place her playthings and the fruit she gathered in her rambles over the old garden—in fact, she had imagined that it had been put there expressly for her amusement; now, however, she recognized the slab as the remains of a pedestal on which a female statue had formerly stood. A portion of a small foot still remained attached to the sandstone. Presently, as the doctor was silent, she said:

"That's the pedestal on which either a nymph or one of the muses stood in by-gone times. I can fancy the beautiful figure she must have had from this little foot. Perhaps she had her head slightly turned toward the river, half facing the old

bridge, so that she could watch the knight riding across, and see also the proud young chatelaine of the castle in her brocaded train—" She checked herself suddenly, for on looking up into the young doctor's face she noticed that he was not heeding her remarks, but evidently absorbed in his own thoughts, which from the expression of his countenance were sad and sorrowful.

The sudden silence of the young girl roused him out of his reverie.

"Yes," he said, shaking himself together. "Those wretched people who stayed here once for awhile took a delight in destroying the statues. The garden was full of sandstone figures at one time; there are several pedestals and disfigured statues lying about the outhouses; I'll have them hunted out and renovated. In spite of its wild and overgrown state, I think that the original plan of the garden can still be traced, and I will have it restored."

"I dare say it will be very pretty and tidy, but—don't you think the charm of this overgrown corner will be lost if you have it, as you say, restored? The peep from your study window—"

"My study will be occupied by a friend of my aunt's next winter," he interrupted, calmly. "In October I settle down in Leipsic."

Kathe stared at him like a startled fawn; clasping her hands, she repeated:

"In Leipsic? You mean to be separated then? What does she say?"

"Flora? She goes with me, of course," he answered, coldly, his eyes flashing pain and anger combined. "Do you imagine I would leave her behind me? You may be at rest on that point then."

Kathe had alluded to his aunt when she spoke, in reference to his journey to Leipsic, and not to Flora, but she was too shy to rectify the mistake, when he had that stern, forbidding look on his face.

Presently she asked, timidly, while her cheeks flushed with anxiety:

"You have just come from the villa?"

"No, I have not been to the villa," he replied, in a tone which appeared to Kathe to have a sarcastic ring in it. "And as yet I have not been fortunate enough to see any of the family; I should have liked to have a word with Moriz, but just as I was passing the house his friends were laughing and

talking and saying good-bye, so I preferred walking on unnoticed."

Then he had not had an interview with Flora, and yet he was thoughtful and absent.

"It is very strange," Kathe said to herself, beginning to feel very uncomfortable and to wish herself anywhere away out of the young man's presence. Fortunately for her, just at this moment the hens began carelessly picking up the grains near the enemy, the dog, who sprung forward, barking furiously. Kathe went over to him and dextrously managed to drive him into his kennel, when she shut to the door and drew the bolt, and thus kept him quiet for the time being.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Kathe turned round from shutting up the watch-dog, she noticed the young doctor's face was white as ashes, and that he was staring in the direction of the bridge. His stern attitude, compressed lips, and contracted brows reminded her of the moment when she had asked him to inform her of the cause of her grandfather's death. Involuntarily following the glance of his eyes, she could not be more startled if she had seen the figure of the drowned noble lady advancing toward her, as she was to recognize Flora's graceful person walking across the bridge with the calm, unembarrassed manner of one who has nothing to fear, and knows she will be welcome, come when she may.

Kathe could scarcely believe her eyesight, as she watched her beautiful sister quietly gliding past the spot where the night before she had passionately declared herself a free woman, after throwing her betrothal-ring under the seething wave. Not twenty hours had elapsed since she had openly declared that her lover had deceived her, and that nothing should ever induce her to cross the threshold of his house again. Yet there she was, smiling and happy looking, and with light eager steps advancing over the pathway direct to the door of his house, and no wave curled its white summit, or gust of wind blew around her whispering of heartlessness, cruelty, and fickleness to the man she was going there to meet.

She was darkly dressed, with a rich black lace veil over her beautiful golden hair, round her throat, and hanging down from her shoulders like the wings of the angel of night. The counselor followed behind with Mme. Urach leaning on his arm, to whom his manner was so respectful and so gentle that Kathe wondered if she had been dreaming in the morning

when he had spoken slightly of her, or was awake now, and in full possession of her senses.

When the little party reached his side of the bridge, the doctor slowly advanced to meet them, and to Kathe's intense surprise greeted them as usual. Nothing was said, nothing was done that was not quite usual and natural. The counselor threw his arms round the young doctor, and spoke a few words of warm congratulation. Mme. Urach was bland and amiable, her lips parted over her sharp glistening teeth in a smile, as she held out her hand; and Flora? For a moment her cheeks assumed a brighter color than usual, and her eyes wandered from her lower to the gravel pathway at her feet; then she held out her hand also, and her fingers were clasped in the same cool, friendly manner that had half pained and half astonished Kathe the first time she saw the two meet in the winter garden, and when Dr. Bruck turned her away again, his face had lost its sternness and the color had returned to his cheeks.

Before they reached the garden Kathe had observed Flora give her a quick searching glance from head to foot, and then turn her head and make some laughing remark to the counselor over her shoulder; but now, as she drew nearer, the young girl could read suppressed anger and animosity shining in the lovely eyes, as she said, raising her voice:

"Well, Kathe? You seem to have made yourself quite at home here. You look as if you had the care of the keys, and had them hanging at your side this moment."

The young girl made no reply, she merely removed her hand from the gate of the yard, and quietly looked Flora straight in the face. Was she not ashamed of herself? Was she not afraid to raise her voice to utter bantering speeches here, in the very spot where she had yesterday declared she would have nothing to do with such poor, wretched surroundings?

"Are you vexed with Flora's nonsense, darling?" asked the counselor, hurrying to Kathe's side, and placing her hand on his arm. "It does not matter if she does tease you; you are a dear little housekeeper, I know. You looked lovely, my child, standing under that dove-cot. Wait a little and you shall have a fowl-yard to your heart's content, the best to be had."

This unusual burst of affectionate enthusiasm from the counselor made Mme. Urach hesitate for a moment on her way to the porch, slightly shake her head and whisper to her granddaughter:

"Brainless fellow! He is, and always will be, the most absurd Commis Voyageur?" at which remark Flora raised her pocket-handkerchief to her mouth to hide a smile.

Kathe left her hand lying unconsciously on her guardian's arm. She scarcely heard what he said, neither did she notice the strange start and manner of the doctor, as he drew back to let her and the counselor pass by; all she saw, all she was conscious of, was that Flora wore a black silk net glove on her left hand, the fine silk lace-work over the white delicate softness of her hand harmonizing well with the rest of her toilet that the two brilliants which had glittered on her third finger a few hours before were not there now, and in their stead the "simple gold ring which weighed as heavy as iron" shone distinctly and clearly through the meshes of her glove. It was impossible! Kathe glanced at the flowing river, then at Flora's hand, and back again at the river without being able to understand if she were awake or dreaming.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mme. Urach, on entering the hall, and pointing to the furniture heaped together in one corner.

"Henriette begged so earnestly to have it removed that I acceded to her wish," replied the doctor, coldly, but kindly.

"And I think she was quite right. It was a queer idea—don't be angry, grandmamma!—to fill a sick-room with so much furniture. The poor child always suffers from oppression on her chest, and now she is ill I don't wonder at her dislike and objection to all those stuffed satin chairs."

Mme. Urach was tempted to give her granddaughter a sharp answer, but she forbore, in consideration of the doctor's presence, and continued her way to the invalid's room.

On opening the door she started back. Henriette had heard and recognized voices from the villa, and as her grandmother entered she was leaning over the bedside with such an anxious excited gaze in her large brilliant eyes, and watching so eagerly the entrance of her visitors, that the old lady feared she was suffering from a paroxysm of fever. A moment later her fears were laid aside by the calm indifferent manner with which the invalid greeted her, but she saw also that the excited look and expression increased as Flora followed her grandmother's steps.

The widow was sitting by the bedside in the old chintz-covered chair. She rose as the ladies entered, and took off her spectacles, but before she had time to utter a word Flora hurried over to her, held out both her hands, and gently ex-

pressed her regret for not having wished her farewell overnight. Then turning to Henriette she said, pleasantly:

"Well, little one, you are going on famously, I hear? I—"

"But you, Flora?" interrupted Henriette, with scarcely concealed impatience, as the counselor came forward and took her hand.

Flora bit her lip to hide a mocking smile.

"I? pretty well! Yesterday's excitement upset me a good deal, but by pure strength of will I have not allowed myself to give way. Of course, yesterday I must have looked wretched. I was ill, and I can't help fancying I was half mad from terror and nervousness; at all events, I seem hardly to be able to remember what I did or said, and no wonder. Daniel in the lion's den was scarcely in a worse position than I among such a lot of savage wretches."

"Well, Kathe defended you courageously," broke in the invalid, angrily. "She stood before you like a shield, and bore the brunt of the blows—kind, brave girl! Moriz, just fancy, they tore her dress from her waist, and pulled down her hair—"

"Such lovely hair as it is, too!" interrupted the widow, caressing Kathe's head with her hand.

"That's quite true, they treated her shamefully," said Flora, frowning, "but I beg to add that that was not entirely my fault. Kathe's mania for always wearing rich silk is mostly to blame there. The wretches grudge us wealth and luxury, of course, and the women clutched at and tore her dress to ribbons, and obliged her to hear—and unfortunately us also—that her grandmother went about barefooted as a girl, and that her grandfather was only a poor laborer who had amassed his immense fortune by hard dealings and so on. I assure you that Kathe's appearance only made matters worse for us, for then they became exasperated against the rich heiress. I am right; am I not, Kathe?"

"Yes, Flora, you are," replied the young girl, trying to smile; but her voice shook as she added: "I shall have a great deal to do to atone for my grandfather's sins."

Mme. Urach's face, while Flora was speaking, was very expressive of satisfaction, nay, almost delight. The coarse allusion to the humble origin of Kathe's grandparents on her mother's side sounded like music in the old lady's ears; she gave a searching look at the counselor. The newly made noble *must* shrink from the thought of taking a wife whose parentage was so well known; whose very fortune was a matter of contention among the scum of the streets.

"What nonsense, Kathe," she said, shaking her head; "that sounds childish and affected. How do you propose beginning your work?"

Flora answered laughingly for her:

"She will open her costly money-bags and shake their contents among the people."

"As you did yesterday with your purse, when you feared your lovely complexion was going to be damaged," observed Henriette, snappishly, her feverish longing to see her lovely sister humiliated to the dust before the doctor forgotten for the moment.

"I don't think I shall be likely to commit such a folly as that," remarked Kathe, earnestly looking at Flora, who was biting her lip with vexation at Henriette's impertinent speech; "but if there is a curse on my money—"

"My dear girl, you need not alarm yourself," broke in the counselor, laughing aloud; "curse, indeed! Happiness and good fortune go hand in hand with your money or rather inheritance—the profits of an arrangement I have just made for you are simply colossal."

The usually half-closed lids covering Mme. Urach's eyes were suddenly raised at this news, and the eyes flashed as they had not done for years with a greedy covetousness that for a moment made her look almost youthful.

"Colossal!" she repeated, catching her breath; "then I will immediately sell out, and join in your undertaking."

"All right, dear grandmother, I will see about it this very evening; the wise man said rightly, that 'where doves are there doves fly,' and never was the old saying so true as it is nowadays. The capitalist is like a rock, on which the very waves cast treasures—"

"Not in the eyes of those who love peace, Moriz," said Dr. Bruck, who was standing by the bedside holding one of Henriette's hands in his, and from time to time begging her not to excite herself, or join in the conversation going on around her. He looked very handsome, but his features had the same thoughtful, sad expression which Kathe had observed, while they were standing by the hen-loft.

"For some time past people have been getting uneasy," he went on after a moment's pause, "and are beginning to hint that this easy mode of gaining money is—"

"Swindling, you mean to say," interrupted the counselor, amused. "My dear fellow, with all due respect to you and your knowledge, I think I understand business transactions

better than you. You are a tiptop doctor—have made your name famous—”

Henriette raised herself from her pillow, and, breathless with vehemence and triumph, asked:

“Did you know that, Flora?”

“Of course I know it, little goose, although the Herr Doctor has not given himself the trouble to inform me personally of his successful cure in Leipsic,” Flora answered, brightly, looking kindly down on the drawn, excited face so eagerly watching hers; “I know, too, that he basks in the sun of royal favor to an extent that is rare among ordinary mortals; but of course it must still be a great state secret, or—his betrothed wife would have known it first.”

A mischievous sunny smile played around her lips, and showed the pearly whiteness of her teeth, and a rosy flush, which deepened the color on her cheeks, made her look more lovely than usual. Henriette lay back on her pillows, bitterly disappointed; even she had failed to understand the chameleon-like nature of her beautiful sister's mind.

“May we not know something more? Are the preliminaries not yet begun?” asked Mme. Urach, with a gracious smile, as she lightly tapped the doctor on the shoulder with her fan, in a far more friendly and familiar manner than she had ever used toward him before.

“He has just returned from the palace,” said the widow, regarding her nephew with pride and affection beaming in her eyes.

“Ah! Then may I ask if Doctor von Bar's retirement is a positive fact?” asked the old lady, with her usual bland smile, but in reality almost breathless from anxiety and fear.

“I don't know, and I did not inquire,” replied the young doctor, with reserve. “The prince wishes me—while I remain here—to look at his foot, which has been painful so long—”

“While you remain here!” repeated Flora, quickly. “Do you mean to leave?”

“I must establish myself in Leipsic in October,” he answered, coldly, not looking at her as he spoke, but gazing absently out of the window.

“What!” exclaimed Mme. Urach, “you have refused rank and position at our court!” and she clasped her hands together in surprise.

“The rank I have no choice about,” he said, with an ironical smile; “it appears it is not etiquette in royal eyes to

allow their doctor to withdraw after a cure without a title; so I am to be dubbed Hofrath,* the prince insists on it."

As he finished speaking his aunt stretched out her hand toward him with tears of emotion in her eyes, and the doctor, who was usually a reserved and undemonstrative man, drew her into his arms, and pressed her against his heart. And for one short moment both aunt and nephew forgot that they were not alone.

Flora turned abruptly round, and swept proudly across to the window, her silk skirt rustling noisily over the polished uncarpeted floor as she went. She bit her lip till it bled, and clinched her soft little hand as though she longed to tear away the faithful loving woman from her nephew's breast.

"But he is going away, auntie,"† remarked Henriette, in her shrill weak voice.

"Yes, my dear, I know he is, because he has won fame, and must work on for a fortune," replied the old lady, raising her smiling face from her nephew's shoulder. "I will willingly remain behind in the home his love and affection have secured for me, if I know he is happy and content while performing his duty in the great world. He has been like a dear son to me, but my work will soon end now, that is, my care of him; another will take my place at his side."

She spoke with earnestness and emotion, while her soft eyes fastened with a tender look on the lovely woman standing by the window.

"She he has chosen will know better how to minister to his happiness than I. She is richly endowed with the gifts that will make his home a center of attraction to him when he is weary with his work, and I hope that she will endeavor to make his life happy under *any* circumstances."

"That is very nice of you to say, my dear Frau Diakonus, and I have no doubt that Flora will make a first-rate physician's wife," replied Mme. Urach, coldly. She did not quite like the widow's indirect reproof of yesterday's ill-temper on the part of her granddaughter, and felt inclined to resent a simple curate's widow presuming to dictate to a member of her family. "But to make life happy in the present day, comfortable rooms are one of the first essentials, and the furnishing of such rooms is causing me no end of worry just now. Only this morning I have had a rather provoking inter-

* Counselor of the Court.

† In Germany, young girls often call the older ladies of their acquaintance "aunt" or "auntie."

view with the head of the firm where I ordered Flora's drawing-room furniture, and although he has had the order for some time, he tells me that it is quite impossible the things can be ready by Whitsuntide, and I was too vexed to hear the reason why. Then, too, Flora has been obliged to scold the woman who is making her linen, who says she can't be ready till at least the end of June. What are we to do?"

"We must wait," said Dr. Bruck, in his abrupt, decided manner, as he took up his hat and stick preparatory to leaving the room.

Mme. Urach was slightly taken aback by this curt mode of putting an end to her difficulties; she seemed perplexed, and an anxious expression crept into her face for a moment, but she bravely rallied her scattered wits, and, tapping the doctor on the shoulder, said:

"That is very good of you, my dear, kind friend, and relieves me of my difficulties at once, for I was afraid you would meet such a proposal with opposition—you were so anxious to have the wedding at Whitsuntide, you know."

"Certainly I was; but then my removal to Leipsic makes a change necessary."

"What does your lady-love say to that?" asked the Frau Diakonus in an uncertain tone, very much disturbed in her mind by the cool business like tranquillity of the doctor and Flora's sudden silence. But the bride-elect came toward her with a radiant face.

"The respite is not unwelcome to me, for the simple reason that my future life and position are all so suddenly altered. I shall have more time to make myself worthy of my position. It is certainly a delicious change for the better! The wife of a celebrated and renowned physician and professor of the university takes her place in the world on a very different footing to the wife of a simple doctor, even if he be Hofrath and physician to the prince."

And she unconsciously drew herself up to her fullest height, her face radiant with the fulfillment of her most ambitious wishes and desires.

The counselor rubbed his hands in glee and smiled approvingly at his sister-in-law's well-timed speech; but Mme. Urach frowned, and had great difficulty in keeping her anger from finding vent in words. She did not approve of her granddaughter's mode of behavior, neither did it please her that she should boast thus openly of occupying a position higher even than her grandmother's in her married days, when her husband held an honorable post at the court. But the old

lady contented herself by remarking, with a warning shake of her head:

"You are soaring high, my dear."

"Only to my brilliant future life, grandmamma," answered Flora, with a mischievous toss of her head, as she turned her back suddenly on the old lady with a quick decisive movement, more expressive than words of her determination to put the past and all things pertaining to it out of her thoughts. "And now, dear aunt, I am going to give myself up to you to do with me as you will," she added, going over to the widow who was watching her narrowly. "I submit unconditionally to be taught everything, provided you will take the trouble to show me how to go to work and make Leo happy. I will learn to sew, cook—" she drew off her gloves as if she meant to begin at once. "Ah! my ring!" she exclaimed, suddenly holding up her hand.

It had slipped from her finger in drawing off her glove, she said, but no one had heard it fall. They all sought for it on the ground, under the carpet—everywhere—but it was not to be found, it seemed to have vanished into air.

"It must have got among your pillows, Henriette," Flora said, with a pale face. "Let me lift you a moment, and let me see if—"

"No, I won't allow that," cried the widow. "She is not to be moved on any account; it is not necessary to disturb her for—"

"Not necessary!" repeated Flora, pettishly. "It is my betrothal-ring, auntie."

Kathe shuddered as she heard this. Could Flora be such a wonderfully lucky girl as to have obtained back her ring from under the waves, or was she willfully and wickedly saying what was false?

"That is a bad omen; however, the ring can't possibly be lost," said the widow in reply. "We shall be sure to find it this evening when Henriette's bed is arranged for the night, and then I will send it over to you by a servant."

"I will reward her royally. I will give her a handful of gold if she does bring it," said Flora, evidently very much put out at her temporary loss, and scarcely able to master her impatience.

Meanwhile Mme. Urach and the counselor drew chairs to the bedside and sat down by Henriette, who had not spoken a word while the ring was being sought for. Once she had raised her head and opened her lips to speak, but had sunk back on her pillows; and once, when Mme. Urach was com-

plaining of the tardiness of the trades-people in forwarding the furniture she had muttered to herself, half to the doctor:

"Because they were partly countermanded; no tradesman would send them home on such terms."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE widow left the room to order coffee, and Kathe followed her. The poor girl's brain was in a whirl from trying to fathom and understand the meaning of the comedy Flora had been playing during the last half hour. She begged "auntie" to let her arrange the coffee in such a coaxing way that the elderly lady willingly acceded to her request, and handed her the bunch of keys generally hanging at her side.

"Dear, dear Kathe! my brave, noble girl!" she said, softly, as she put her arm round the maiden's waist and drew her close to her bosom; "I love to look into your sweet innocent face, it gives me a feeling of peace and rest, and makes me think of Luther and his true, brave, beloved Katherine, who walked by his side through life, always helping and encouraging him by her strong courage and undaunted faith in him. You are a dear child, Kathe!" and she tenderly kissed the blushing girl, sighed deeply as if moved by some inward misgiving, and quietly returned to the invalid's room.

Kathe went to the pantry and took out the coffee and the freshly baked sponge-cake which she knew the widow would like to have placed before her guests, and while the maid was putting fresh logs of wood in the stove to boil the kettle, she filled the pretty blue glass basin with sugar and polished the crystal cake-dish. She had just begun to cut the round cake in slices when she heard some one coming out of Henriette's room. The kitchen door was partly open, and through this opening she saw Flora cross the hall.

The bride-elect was evidently uncertain which way to turn; she was not at home in the "wretched surroundings" of the doctor's house, but her eyes must have had some magnetic influence, for as she glanced hesitatingly at the opposite door it suddenly opened and the doctor himself appeared on the threshold.

Flora flew over to him with outstretched arms. Her long black dress trailed over the red stone floor, the dark drooping veil hanging behind her like a cloud. With her small white hands stretching forth from the falling black lace, and her pale face and flashing eyes and sable robes, she looked like the beautiful woman whom legendary lore declares to rise at night

from her grave to murder the young of every living thing she meets.

"Leo!" it was a low musical voice which half whispered the name.

Kathe could hardly believe her ears, her breath came and went in wondering surprise. Was it really Flora's voice? It was so soft and tender, so entreating in its tone that surely the lips that Kathe had heard angrily asserting her desire to be free only the evening before, could not have uttered that sweet, loving sound now? The young girl turned her eyes away, the knife shook in her trembling fingers, and she longed to shut the door, so as neither to see nor to be seen, but she had not the courage or strength to move from where she stood. There was no answer to the soft appeal.

"Leo, look at me!" said Flora, louder, and in a more entreating tone. "Look at me, and don't torture me in this way when your own heart even rebels against it. I know you are trying hard to appear stern and punish me, but thank God! it is hard for you to do it! Am I to be punished because yesterday I was half mad with excitement, and did not know what I was saying or doing? Leo, my life, which belongs to you, was in danger; my blood boils still as I think of it—and—you are exciting me still more, Leo!"

Kathe was spell-bound, and for a moment could attend to nothing else but Flora's words; the next she heard the maid at her side titter with surprise at such a beautiful lady apologizing to her young master. In an instant Kathe recovered her self-possession, ordered the servant to set the coffee-cups, and quickly placing the cake on the crystal dish she took it up and walked courageously to the hall with it in her hand. In spite of herself she saw as she left the kitchen the doctor's stern, pale face turned away from his bride, his arms hanging loosely by his side, and his lips compressed as if with pain, while Flora hung round his neck in a close clinging attitude.

The sharp closing of the kitchen door made the young man look that way, and at the same instant his eyes encountered Kathe's.

If he had been caught in some guilty act he could not have started more violently, or the blood have rushed to his brow with greater force than it did now, as he endeavored to disengage himself from the embrace of his betrothed. But Flora would not loosen her hands, she merely glanced at her young half-sister, and burying her head deeper on his shoulder muttered in his ear:

"Nonsense, Leo, it is only Kathe."

Kathe heard and hurried across the hall as fast as her feet would carry her into the sick-room. Her heart beat aloud in her vexation and shame at having witnessed the sensational Romeo and Juliet scene outside. With trembling hands she placed the cake-dish on the table, and at Henriette's express wish put a morsel of the sweet cake in the canary's cage.

On the clean white sand at the foot of the cage lay the much-sought-for gold ring, which must have slipped through the bars without hitting the wires and noiselessly fallen on the soft sand inside. Kathe lifted it up and quietly put it in her pocket. The coffee had still to be made, but Kathe shrunk from going back through the hall to the kitchen. She fidgeted about the canary, now giving it a bit of sugar, then a bit more cake, listening the while to Mme. Urach's remarks about the *trousseau*, and vaguely wondering why she should be so anxious to impress the widow with the importance of everything being in the right style.

As the minutes rolled on the young girl grew more and more nervous and unwilling to surprise the lovers a second time in their *tête-à-tête* interview. How should she manage? The coffee must be made, and she *must* make up her mind to face the hall. How great was her relief when the door opened and the doctor walked in. Quick as lightning she slipped past him without raising her eyes, and went out into the hall. It was empty. Flora was not there. The maid was grinding the coffee in the kitchen. Perhaps it was the disagreeable noise of the mill which had shortened the reconciliation scene.

The coffee was soon made and the tray laid; and while the maid put on a clean apron to carry it into the sick-room, Kathe went over to the window, took the ring from her pocket and examined it. "E. M., 1843," was engraved on the inner side. Ernst Mangold. It was not the ring come back in some mysterious way from under the waves of the river, but the marriage-ring of Flora's mother.

Kathe grew cold all over as she thought of the false, mean part Flora was playing. Her own frank, innocent nature could hardly understand a disposition that was ready for every emergency, and that, with a cold indifference as to consequences, could gather up the threads of intrigue and make use of them to weave a fresh net for future use. She shuddered and drew back, and glanced with a pained feeling at her heart at the little simple symbol of faithful love that Flora's mother had worn to the day of her death, and that now, through her daughter's false-heartedness and deception, had become sullied and dishonored. It burned her fingers as she

held it, and she wished she might have thrown it into the shining river out of every one's sight. But it was not hers, it belonged to Flora, and to Flora she must return it, and that without delay.

Slowly quitting the kitchen, Kathe went out into the porch. Flora was standing by the palings, gazing into the distance, with her back to the house, her arms folded on her bosom, and her fair golden hair shining brilliantly in the sun. The watch-dog had caught sight of her figure, and began barking so furiously that his noise prevented Kathe's approach being heard. When she reached Flora's side the latter started visibly and contracted her eyebrows into a deeper frown, while her angry face flushed scarlet and her eyes flashed scornfully.

"You are there again, are you? prying into and meddling with what does not concern you!" she said, in a tone that was neither refined nor lady-like.

Kathe's cheeks flushed with indignation at this unlooked-for attack, and she felt inclined to resent her half-sister's bitter insinuations by a few hot words, but she checked the inclination, and said, with reserve and pride:

"I have found the ring."

"Give it me!" Her features softened, she took the ring from Kathe's outstretched hand and slipped it on her finger. "I am very glad it is found. It was rather an unfortunate sign."

"You don't mean to say that you look upon it as a bad omen?" remarked Kathe.

"Why not? Do you imagine that people with minds are *naturally* free from superstition? Napoleon I. was as superstitious as an old beldame, let me tell you; and I—I don't deny, at least, that I am, too."

She looked into Kathe's eyes with an entreating, but firm, commanding gaze, as if she would compel her young half-sister to forget all that had passed not very far from the spot where they were both now standing. But Kathe's fearless honesty and straightforwardness were not to be daunted. With hot cheeks and kindling eyes she said quietly, as she pointed in the direction of the bridge:

"You forget, Flora, that you were not alone when you stood there last night."

Flora laughed bitterly.

"That's what comes of having a young sister constantly running against one's skirts. That is just like a school-girl—to judge and condemn one's actions when one hardly knows what one is doing, and then remind one of them at unpleasant

times. Have I not already declared in there," and she pointed to the windows of the room where Henriette was lying, "that yesterday's scene in the forest upset my nerves to such an extent that I was half mad, and consequently not responsible for what I said and did afterward? My dear Kathe, you, in your superior wisdom, seem inclined to intimate that, as—well—as my betrothal-ring is under the river, that it is impossible for it to bring me bad luck. That's it, is it not, little one?" She laughed sharply again. "What if, in all my passion and excitement, or any other feeling a dispassionate critic might be disposed to call the state I was in, I had not thrown my little jewel from me? Did you hear it fall, my dear? Impossible! for here it is"—she drew the hoop on her finger—"although it seemed just now as if it were inclined to part company with me forever."

"Because it is too large. Your fingers are more slender than your mother's were," remarked Kathe, bitterly, her whole body trembling with anger. Flora sprung forward as if she meant to strike her.

"You viper!" she hissed between her teeth. "I knew the very first moment I saw your round, dairy-maid face that you would cast a shadow across my path in life. How can you stoop to dodge me and my actions as if you were a spy? You spying me? Is that the honorable way your 'excellent' Lucas has brought you up?"

"Leave Lucas out of the question!" said Kathe, quietly, her half-sister's sudden outburst of passion and anger cooling her own. "Whatever I may think or do, my education has nothing to do with it. I *know* that I inherit my father's love of honor, for I hate and despise falseness of every kind, and I would be dumb for the rest of my life sooner than tell a lie. If you have accustomed those around you in daily private life to wink at and tolerate your falseness, don't expect it from me; young and unaccustomed to the world as I may be, you won't change me in that respect. I won't allow myself to be hoodwinked. I have good eyes and a good memory—"

"Ah, yes, those are nature's gifts, which in a more refined disposition would be modified, of course, as regards their observations," interrupted Flora, who had several times smiled scornfully while her sister was speaking, and made a move as if to go away and leave her and her moralizing together. She had clinched her hands, bitten her lips, and snipped off the buds from a neighboring bush, but she had not moved away, and now spoke without a trace of the passion she had exhibited

not five minutes previously. "I don't know whether you understand me, child; I hardly think so," she added, shrugging her shoulders; "you have your own rule for judging other people, and you unfortunately adhere to it as firmly as the shopman does to his yard measure, no matter if he is selling fine stuff or coarse, red, green, or yellow. But I will try and make myself plain to you, and make you understand me once for all."

Stepping nearer to the young girl, so near that Kathe felt the warmth of her breath on her face, she went on, in a low suppressed voice, as she glanced for a second at the windows:

"Well, you are right, my betrothal-ring lies under the river where I threw it in a fit of uncontrollable disgust at the thought of a life of poverty by Bruck's side. A girl of your ideas will not be able to understand that, but no matter. You think only of a husband who has a pleasant appearance, is well grown, and has a handsome mustache, and when once the irrevocable 'yes' is promised, you would go with him through fire and water—all of which is very good in its way. Such a girl would become a self-sacrificing mother, and bring up her sons in a worthy manner, I have no doubt. A girl of this kind, though, would love to hide under the shelter of her home and timidly shut her eyes if an eagle soared in the air above her. But in that sort of eagle I should glory. I would soar in the air with him, for that is the air I like to breathe, and never leave his side; on the contrary, I would urge his mounting higher, trying his strong wings in still higher—"

"And if he damaged his wings and fell you would cry out he was only a crow, and leave him to his fate, like a coward," broke in Kathe. But the moment the words were out of her mouth she recognized the force of their taunt, revealing as they did the outspoken truth of her half-sister's shameless conduct, by the paleness which overspread Flora's face and the lassitude of her manner; but she went on courageously: "If you had only left him quietly and silently it would have been better, instead of bitterly crying out that you hated him! You declared he had deceived you, and been false to his position; you said this only last night, on the very spot where you are now standing, and yet you returned to the house—"

"As Doctor Bruck's adored bride-elect, who had first to bear a terrible reverse in order to enable her to appreciate to the full the intensity of her future happiness," Flora finished, with a triumphant smile, as her sister hesitated for a moment. "You can be charmingly impertinent, Kathe! I was quite struck just now with the ready way you turned my own para-

ble against me. Your plebeian inclinations and propensities are all very well in their way, but they go too far when they lead you into misunderstanding a nature like mine, and a soul full of aspirations and fire. How can you understand a psychological problem? Had I spoken yesterday of unfaithful friendship, you might, with some show of reason, pretend to be shocked at the sudden change in my manner, and say I was merely playing a part, simply because friendship never breaks forth into love passion; but *hatred* and love lie side by side in the human breast—they set fire to each other, and very often a burning, outspoken hatred is the result of an excess of love. You, with your blunted feelings, are not capable of understanding the nicety of the distinction. You would cook your husband a favorite dish to reconcile him; but a nature like mine would burst forth into bitter accusations, of burning self-accusation, and suffer death for his sake.”

Then, laying her hand under her bosom, as if she were stabbing herself with a stiletto, she added:

• “And now I will say that never have I loved Leo Bruck so passionately or so intensely as since I have known that he has suffered like a martyr, and held his tongue like the hero that he is—since I have had to confess, too, that I pained and wounded him deeply; but never, never”—she suddenly seized Kathe’s hand, and the slender white fingers were as cold as the current of air from over the water—“no, never before,” she hissed into Kathe’s ear, “*never* till now did I feel such hot, glowing jealousy! Mind that, child! He is *my* property; and even if I have nothing worse to fear than you—he does not care for you, that I noticed long ago; besides, he has only eyes and ears for me—still, I am not accustomed to endure any one near me who so persistently lays herself out to please as you do. Your housewifely doings and continual coming and going in this house do not please me. You will for the future discontinue everything of the kind. Do you understand?”

And with this plain and undisguised behest she gathered up her sweeping skirts and walked slowly back to the house, evidently to avoid any further discussion. But it was an unnecessary precaution on her part.

Kathe’s face and lips had turned white as death, but she had no desire nor any intention of replying in words to such haughty, double-tongued observations as had just fallen from her half-sister’s lips. Her young honor-loving nature recoiled from so much duplicity; and she was silent.

CHAPTER IX.

It was the month of May. The trees were sprouting forth young leaves, the splendid hyacinth beds, which had been the pride of the gardener and delight of all visitors at the villa, were faded and over for the season; the tiny buds on the syringa bushes were deepening in color, green little petals were beginning to appear on the rose-trees, and the shadows of the pretty zigzag walk and linden avenue were growing broader and broader each day. The river had become brighter and clearer, and flowed along between its green banks with a glimmer and sparkle on its surface, which the beautiful May sun intensified; while behind the old house a sweet perfume of May flowers filled the air, and the thick, strong vine which clung to the walls at the side began to look gay with its green leaves and shoots.

Henriette had long since been removed to the villa, and was apparently stronger and better now than she had been for many months past. "Auntie Diakonus," as the girls called the doctor's aunt, ascribed this improvement entirely to the effect of Kathe's good nursing.

The two sisters lived a quiet, retired existence, which they both seemed to intensely enjoy, especially since Kathe's piano had stood in her own room; and this peaceful daily life away from the excitement of society, which Henriette had formerly shrunk from with a vehemence that was painful in her delicate state of health, together with the refining and kindly influence of constant visits from the widow, seemed to have produced a wonderful change in the mind of the invalid as well as in her body.

While the two girls were thus living apart by themselves the drawing-rooms in the villa were never so thronged with visitors as since their host had become ennobled. Festivities and gayeties of every kind were daily organized, in which the inventive powers of Mme. Urach and the wealth of the counselor appeared inexhaustible. Certainly the counselor was a fortunate man. Everything he touched seemed to turn into gold. All his undertakings in the commercial world were not only successful, but simply fabulous in their returns, and his reported income amounted to millions of thalers; and, with all his success, he was a great favorite. He seemed to understand the art of winning friends and keeping them. The haughtiness and pride of fortune and nobility were never discernible either

in his manner or speech. Always pleasant, affable, kindly, and simple, he made every one admire him, and gave no occasion for envy and hatred.

The promenade in front of the villa, under the overhanging linden-trees, became the daily resort of fashionable families. Strangers begged for admittance to the house, to admire the costly paintings, sculpture, and works of art which, day by day, were being added to the already rich collection. And when the fine dust raised by the wheels of one of the counselor's exquisite carriages blew into the eyes of the loiterers, as it drew up before the villa, facetious remarks would be uttered that "surely it must be gold dust," as it belonged to the millionaire who owned the property.

Alterations of various kinds were going on about the park. Here and there familiar pathways were temporarily rendered impassable by beautiful slabs and blocks of white marble lying across the grass, for the improvements going on in the stables, which had long since become too small for the increased number of horses.

Immense mounds of earth marked the spot where the new lake was to be, and numbers of workmen were occupied in decorating and repairing a large ancient pavilion, which commanded an uninterrupted view of the town on one side, of the promenade and grounds around the house on the other. The interior of the house itself had been subject to many alterations and many changes; under pretense of enlarging a window, or having a door opened through a wall, the counselor had suggested changing the furniture of the room, and had produced from his pocket samples of rich carpet and designs for embellishing the ceiling, entreating Mme. Urach to make a choice and give orders for the furnishing of the room, according to the dictates of her invariable good taste. She generally grumbled and objected at first, but in the end agreed to the wishes of her grandson-in-law, while protesting against improvements which she herself considered quite unnecessary.

While these alterations were going on the counselor came and went like a bird of passage. He traveled about a great deal, and when asked by Mme. Urach why he did not retire from business, he replied that he intended doing so in a short time, when he would purchase an estate for himself and live on his property as befitted his rank and wealth. Whenever he allowed himself a few days' leisure at the villa he passed many of his hours on the first-floor in Henriette's and Kathe's private sitting-room, where he never failed to appear also for his after-dinner coffee; and as Mme. Urach was far too wide

awake to allow her "dear Moriz" to lounge about Henriette's sofa alone with the two girls, she made a sacrifice of herself and generally managed to appear in the room either a few moments after his entrance there, or to join him on the stairs before his arrival.

As far as Kathe was concerned, she was very grateful to the old lady for her opportune visits. The young girl felt a strange painful shyness in her guardian's presence, since the time when he had spoken so tenderly and affectionately to herself, but so falsely and slightly of Mme. Urach. Unwillingly she adopted toward him the bashful reserve of a grown-up young lady, where she had formerly been as outspoken and ingenuous as a child. But this change in her manner appeared to delight the counselor, and to render her presence more and more attractive to him. Every wish of hers he gratified as soon as he had had time to divine it. Some weeks ago he had sold the uncultivated piece of the Mill-house garden to the factory hands, and any charity scheme of hers he had carried out at once, and no matter how often her purse was empty he refilled it without an objection.

"You can have what you want, Kathe; I shall soon have to buy you another strong-box," he remarked once, glancing significantly at the iron safe containing the receipts of her immense fortune, a note of which he held in his hand.

She did not reply, but received the statement with an air of gloomy reserve that did not escape his notice. In spite of his diplomatic reasoning and wily answers to her searching questions relative to the manner in which her grandfather's fortune had been realized, the doubt raised by the women in the forest, that it had not been gained without considerable oppression among the poorer classes, remained obstinately in her mind, and each time her wealth was alluded to she grew silent and nervous, and evidently afraid of the amount of gold she possessed.

During the past few weeks she had become more thoughtful and less childish than formerly. The sunny smile which had illuminated her face fifty times a day was rarely seen now, her joyous laughter was hardly ever heard, her old merriness and light-heartedness seemed to have quite deserted her, except when she passed a few hours in the house by the river, and then only returned by fits and starts.

It was the widow's custom to collect as many of the poor children of the neighborhood as she could gather together every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon, for the purpose of teaching them to sew and knit; and in this charitable work

Kathe earnestly entreated to be allowed to take an active part. She loved children dearly, and the little creatures soon learned to love her as warmly as she herself could wish. She clothed them where necessary, making the pinafores and frocks herself, and what the widow could not possibly do—provided a meal of bread, and fruit, and milk for each of the children, when the lesson in sewing was over. The old lady's face always beamed with satisfaction, as the young girl appeared at her bi-weekly gatherings with a tray of fruit and dainty little loaves in her hand, which she distributed among the hungry little guests, with a smile that made the welcome gift a double pleasure to receive. When the weather permitted, the poor children were allowed to sit out under the trees and enjoy the sweet fresh air; and often when the work had been done well, and little fingers had diligently mastered the difficulty of turning a heel in a stocking, or hemming the bib to an apron, Kathe would produce balls, skipping-ropes and other toys, and encourage the children to play for an hour on the grass in front of the house before returning home to their fathers and mothers.

These proceedings did not please Flora at all; but she had the good sense to refrain from openly expressed objections to what Kathe did in the hearing of the inmates of the house by the river, for she knew, as she remarked one day with a sneer: "The old lady thinks all the world of Kathe, and imagines she is endowed with every virtue under the sun."

Flora herself visited the house every day; she had had a dozen white embroidered aprons made, in one of which she always appeared, knowing full well that it became her charmingly, and pleased the widow, whom she exerted herself to her utmost to fascinate. She would stoop her lovely face over the hot stove, while "auntie" taught her how to make pancakes; she learned the art of preserving fruit and bottling vegetables; she penetrated the mysteries of the laundry, and even once took up an iron and passed it slowly over a handkerchief that the maid had just straightened for ironing. She looked over the housekeeping books, and made her head ache by casting up accounts, but do what she would she could not succeed in coaxing the widow out of the habitual reserve of manner she had adopted toward her since the evening of the day Henriette had been carried to her house.

The sudden change in Dr. Bruck's future prospects was still regarded with wonder and astonishment. Many of the families in town found it difficult to believe that the hitherto slighted and retiring young doctor could possibly be the man who was

henceforward to walk along the streets of the capital as an honored Hofrath and professor. Public opinion veered round in his favor, patients poured in from all quarters, and a fortnight after his good fortune in securing the duke's favor was known he rarely had time to sit half an hour at his desk—had to sleep in town, dine where he could, and if he wished to pay a flying visit to the villa and his aunt, he was obliged to steal the time for his absence by refusing to place on his overfull list the name of a new patient.

Kathe saw him very seldom, and when she did she could not help remarking how changed he was. He looked pale and haggard, and an absent, thoughtful, well-nigh gloomy manner had taken the place of his formerly reserved but genial conversation and appearance. Since the moment when she had surprised him with Flora's arms round his neck he had scarcely interchanged two words with Kathe, and then in such a hurried shy way that the young girl fancied he could not forgive her unintentional appearance on that occasion, and resented it by avoiding her whenever he could. She, on her side, felt wounded and pained by his coldness, and rarely ever entered the room when she knew he was likely to be there.

His manner to Flora had not undergone the slightest change as far as Kathe could observe. He had ever been a reserved undemonstrative lover since Kathe had known him; but often she found herself wondering whether the passionate scene in Henriette's sick-room had been a mere dream on her part, or whether the young doctor was capable of forgetting disagreeable events sooner and more completely than other people. Flora must naturally have hoped that after humbling herself to beg for forgiveness for her bitter words, her lover would return to the old affectionate relations which had existed between them when first they were engaged. Was he not supremely happy in feeling sure of her whom he had so passionately worshiped, even when she repulsed him? Perhaps he preferred concealing his happiness—at all events he did not show it; and his beautiful betrothed comforted herself with the thought that a man of his temperament found it rather hard to forgive; but that when once they were married, and the wedding was fixed for September, all would be well.

In the meanwhile, the 20th of May, Flora's birthday, arrived. Her room was gay with sweet-smelling flowers, sent by many of her friends. On a center-table stood a superb bouquet, the gift of the reigning duchess, who sent it early in the day as a mark of honor to the future wife of the new Hofrath, and several congratulatory messages had arrived during the

morning from various members of the royal family. Certainly the fair bride had cause to congratulate herself on her future prospects, and to consider herself, at least on this special day, a favorite of the gods. And yet a shadow was over her forehead, and her mouth quivered more than once with suppressed impatience and anger. On a round table, between her grandmother's gifts and those of her sisters, stood a handsome black varble time-piece, the birthday gift of Dr. Bruck. He had sent it with an accompanying note, saying that it was impossible for him to come over to the villa in the morning, on account of his not being able to leave a patient who was dangerously ill.

"I can't understand Leo's not finding me a prettier present than that stone thing there," she said, with an air of vexation, to Mme. Urach, who was stooping over the duchess's bouquet as if she expected it to smell sweeter than the others about the room. "A black birthday present is not a happy choice—and I must say that I think it is greatly wanting in taste on his part."

"The clock is just the thing for this room, and was chosen to please you, Flora—it matches the furniture splendidly," said Henriette, who was lying on a sofa near the window, as she pointed significantly to the corners of the room.

"Absurd! You know as well as I do that I can't carry away the furniture here. Moriz had it made to please me, but he did not *give* it to me; besides, I have no desire to take it; one gets as weary of looking at the same furniture always as one would at the same dress. What can I do with that black thing? It won't do to put it in my boudoir in Leipsic, where the walls are to be pale lilac and the decorations all of bronze."

"A fresh bunch of flowers would have been more to my taste, but then you see, Flora, you are not a bit sentimental," answered Henriette, with a malicious twinkle in her eyes, as she glanced across at Kathe, who was standing by an exquisite myrtle-tree.

This myrtle plant had been reared with great care by "Auntie Diakonus," who had sent it over to the bride-elect as a birthday gift; but few besides Kathe and Henriette seemed to appreciate the beauty of the present, or to understand that it had been given at the cost of great self-sacrifice on the part of the widowed lady.

After dinner the drawing-rooms and balcony were soon filled with a succession of visitors, who came to congratulate Flora, and to admire the tables full of presents. The day was so

warm that windows and doors were thrown open, and the sweet perfumed outer air gained free admittance through the magnificent sweep of apartments in which the guests were assembled.

Henriette reclined on a sofa near the open balcony door. She had wished to appear on this festive occasion in a toilet of pure white tulle and muslin, similar to the dress Kathe was wearing to-day for the first time, but prudence compelled her to wrap her emaciated figure in a white *crêpe de Chine* shawl, over which her heavy fair hair fell in rich and luxuriant abundance. She looked very ill, and the sunlight playing over her face seemed to heighten the dark rim round her unnaturally large eyes, to sharpen the thin outlines of her features, and to render more plain than usual the leaden hue of her complexion, which was never tinged with color unless she was suffering from feverishness. She had just begged Kathe to go and play Schubert's exquisite melody, the "*Lob der Thranen*," and was impatiently waiting for her to begin, when her pale face suddenly flushed scarlet, and her thin hands were clasped to her bosom as if in pain—for on the threshold of the door opposite to the music-room stood Dr. Bruck.

Flora flew to his side, and put her hand through his arm, and ere he had time to greet half her assembled guests she entreated him to follow her into her room in order to look at her numerous gifts. In spite of her nine-and-twenty years, and latent desire to be regarded as a blue-stocking, Flora displayed to-day the naïve, ingenuous manners of a girl of sixteen, which her sweet face and graceful figure enabled her to adopt to perfection.

Kathe was standing by the piano, looking for the notes of the desired melody, when the engaged pair entered and passed through the room. Dr. Bruck bowed, she shyly returned his silent greeting, and without a word continued her occupation. Presently through the open door she heard Flora say:

"Leo, I have determined to-day to put an end to the past, in which I have made so great a mistake, and which was well-nigh the cause of my losing the happiness of my life. I will not refer to that miserable evening when I lost all control over my reason, and uttered words that I in my heart knew to be false, or rather I only refer to it to tell you that you also were wrong in what you said. It was not a mere impulse which prompted me to write—it may as well be said once and for all—but my inborn genius. Don't question me further—though I will tell you that I should have succeeded as an author if only by means of a work of mine, that you have not

ren, on 'Women.' It has been favorably criticised by those competent to judge of its merits, and my name would have been honored in the literary world; but how could I possibly think now of going through life by *your* side, and at the same time devote my energies to developing my own special talents? No, no, Leo, I will bask in the glory and brightness of your greatness as becomes an admiring wife; and in order to avoid, in the future, being tempted to return to my much-loved study, these manuscripts, which are the result of many hours of thought and poetic inspiration, shall disappear forever from the face of the earth."

Kathe found the piece of music at last, and as she went over to the piano she saw Flora strike a lucifer, light the leaves of the manuscript, and throw it hesitatingly into the empty stove. With a half glance toward the doctor the young girl observed that he made no attempt to hinder the destruction of the precious papers. Whatever Flora may have hoped or expected from him he made no sign of wishing to stop the *auto-da-fè*.

Silent and gloomy in expression he stood unmoved by the window; and while the fumes of the burning paper were wafted by the summer air to the music-room, and Flora watched the consuming flames with quivering lips and flashing eyes, Kathe placed herself on the music-stool, and began playing Liszt's well-known arrangement of the "Lob der Thränen," determined not to hear Dr. Bruck's reply to Flora's ostentatious self-sacrifice, unwilling witness as she had again been to a scene between him and his betrothed wife.

As her fingers mechanically passed over the keys, the thought flashed through her brain that he would hate her in time if he became aware of her presence during such moments of private explanation. She heard him speaking, but though his voice reached her ears the words he uttered were unintelligible; for she resolutely applied her energies to the task before her, and would not allow herself to be beguiled into paying the least attention to what was passing in the room at her side.

Presently, when she had finished, on rising from her seat, she saw Flora emerging from her sanctum, about to cross over to the outer drawing-room. She was not now hanging caressingly on her lover's arm, as she had been when she traversed the apartment a short while previously, but walked slowly by his side, holding the princess's bouquet in her hand, with a downcast mien about her, as if she had been forced to recognize at last that she had found her master.

As she passed the piano she cast an angry glance at Kathe, and, standing still for a moment, said, sharply:

"What a blessing you have finished, child! You were making such a terrible noise just now one could hardly hear one's self speak even in the next room. You play your own compositions very nicely; but then they are such simple, childish melodies, without much depth in them, but Schubert and Liszt are beyond you, my dear, and require more practice and greater knowledge of music than you possess to render them perfectly, and you are not yet a finished pianist."

"Henriette asked me to play the piece for her," replied Kathe, quietly. "I have never given myself out as a finished pianist—"

"No, darling, we know you have not; and I am very glad you don't go in for gymnastics on the piano," broke in Henriette, who was standing on the threshold of the door. "But no one knows better than you how to play Schubert with the deepest feeling. Perhaps Flora fancies that the tears you bring to one's eyes when playing his compositions are the result of mere compliment?"

"Diseased nerves, my dear—nothing more!" Flora replied, laughingly, as she followed the doctor into the large drawing-room.

Here Mme. Urach was sitting, with a flushed face and troubled aspect, one hand holding her eyeglass, the other a letter which had just been brought to her by a servant.

"Oh, my dear Hofrath!" she began, as the young doctor entered the room, addressing him by his new title, which she made use of as often as it was possible to introduce it in conversation. "I have just received a letter from my friend Baroness Steiner, in which she announces her intention of coming here in a few days, in order to seek help and advice from you. It appears that her little grandson, the last scion of the old Von Brandau family, has been limping in his walk lately, and the worthy doctors she has had to see him are evidently perplexed about the cause of this misfortune. Will you examine the boy, and undertake the case?"

"Very willingly, on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That the lady does not make too great a demand on my time," replied the young doctor, who knew from experience that high-born aristocratic mothers were apt to consider time as of no account, and liked to have a passing cold treated with the same attention as a serious illness.

Mme. Urach was perceptibly hurt at the indifferent manner

in which her request was granted, but she said nothing. Presently, turning to Flora, she said:

"The baroness is evidently offended at my last letter to her, in which I was obliged to put off her visit to us for a time. She says as much in this"—and the old lady tapped the paper in her hand with her eyeglass—"and I have no doubt that it would have been long ere she wrote to me again but for this new sorrow and anxiety about her grandson. You may imagine, Flora, how grieved I am about it. She now suggests staying at a hotel, the one most available for our Hofrath; and begs me to engage at least *five* rooms for her. She regrets we are so full that we can not take her in," added the old lady, as she glanced reproachfully at the young girl standing at her side.

Kathe blushed with pride and shame that Mme. Urach should thus covertly reproach her for a position she had no power to change, and then the sweet girlish face paled as she opened her lips to speak. But ere she had time to utter a sound Mme. Urach went on:

"We could manage to have her here, and put her on the first-floor, if she were not so particular about having five rooms. I suppose she wants a sitting-room for herself and her daughter, also another for little Job Brandau and his *bonne*, and three bedrooms—for she brings her maid with her, of course," she added, as she rested her head on her hand.

"All of which means that Kathe is in the way, and you wish this exacting baroness to occupy her rooms. Is it not so, grandma?" cried Henriette, in her usual sharp angry tones.

"I have already suggested going over to the Mill-house," remarked Kathe, quietly, as she gently smoothed Henriette's hair.

"I know a better plan than that, Kathe, if you are obliged to move at all," continued the little invalid, her eyes brightening. "We will ask Auntie Diakonus to let you have that nice pleasant spare room of hers. I know she will be delighted to have you, for she loves you dearly and thinks no one equal to you. Your piano can be taken over for you, and then I shall come and see you as often as I can. I know 'auntie' will let me, for—" She broke off suddenly as her glance fell on the doctor, who had turned away to the window, but now faced round upon her with such flashing eyes that the poor little invalid fancied he must be out of his mind.

"I think it would be more practical and better in every way to send the boy and his *bonne* to my house," he said, coldly and decisively.

Mme. Urach fidgeted with the string of her cap, and made no attempt to repress an ironical smile which played for a moment round her mouth as she replied:

"I am afraid, my dear Hofrath, that that arrangement is quite out of the question. My old friend would never dream of parting with the child, besides, you have no idea what a spoiled, pampered boy he is. Our hereditary prince is not half so luxuriously brought up as this last and only scion of the Brandaus. The ugly puny child sleeps in a bed of satin and lace, and— Well, the family are rich, you see, and think all such luxuries indispensable; even we find it a difficult matter to entertain them in a manner, they are—"

"How can you suggest taking such a little wretch who is the most tiresome and willful of boys into your house, Leo? He would worry 'auntie' to death," broke in Henriette, addressing the doctor; and utterly regardless of what she was saying, she went on excitedly: "What has Kathe done to vex you? I have been noticing for a long time how cold and unfriendly you are to her. What is it? Is she not grand enough for you, because her grandfather was the old castle miller? You never seem to think it worth your while to talk to her, and really it is too absurd, for after all she is Flora's sister as much as I am, although her mother was not ours. We had the same father, you know. We all say 'thee' and 'thou' to each other, why should she not say it to you, and you to her, as I do?"

"My dear Henriette, I have never particularly liked the habit you have fallen into of saying 'thou' to Leo, and if I could have my own way you should not do it any more than Kathe," said Flora, sharply. "I have no notion of allowing any one else to share in my special privileges if I can help it, though in your case I make no objection now, considering you have claimed the right from the very first, but I see no reason for Kathe's assuming any such intimacy with Leo, and I shall strenuously oppose it," and she threw her arms around her lover's neck and looked up smilingly in his face.

It might have been that the young man objected to being caressed in the presence of others, or perhaps Henriette's reproach had irritated him beyond endurance, for he started aside as if he had been stung when the soft hand touched his shoulder, and his face grew livid and pale.

Kathe took advantage of the momentary silence which followed Flora's energetic remark, to quit her position by Mme. Urach's chair, and to walk toward the door with the intention of leaving the room. The poor girl's heart ached, and she

longed to burst into tears. Bitterly as she felt the unkindness of Mme. Urach's behavior toward her, and the awkwardness of her position with Dr. Bruck after Flora's absurd refusal to admit her into the intimacy enjoined by Henriette, she held back her tears, and forced her manner to assume a certain amount of calmness, which she was far from feeling inwardly.

She had nearly reached the door when it was suddenly opened from the outside, and the counselor walked in. For one moment Kathe forgot all the shyness and reserve which she had lately felt toward him, all the annoyance caused by his undisguised preference for her society; she only saw before her the guardian who stood to her in the place of her father, the man to whom she had a right to look for protection and help in every difficulty and trouble, and following an impulse over which she had no control, she sprung toward him and laid her hand on his arm.

He looked surprised and pleased, smiled down on the upturned, beseeching face at his side, and pressed the hand resting on his arm close to his heart. In his hand he held a somewhat bulky paper box, which he laid on the table near where Mme. Urach was sitting.

His entrance had interrupted a rather unpleasing scene, and Henriette, whose unfortunate remark had been the cause of the mischief, was so delighted at his unexpected arrival that she uttered half aloud, half to herself:

"I could hug you, you dear Moriz, for coming here just at this very moment!"

"It is a comfort to know one is welcome, at any rate," replied the counselor, with one of his bright genial smiles, as he caught the words and stretched out his hands to the little invalid reclining on the sofa. Then turning his handsome face toward Flora, he said:

"At last I have brought you *my* birthday gift, Flora, and very glad I am it is all right. My agent accounts for his delay in sending it by remarking on the excessive care needed in making it," and he loosened the lid while he spoke. "Apropos to your birthday I have still another pleasure for you," he interrupted himself to add in a light gay tone. "I have just been told that you are revenged, inasmuch as the leader of that attack on you in the forest has been condemned this morning, and is to suffer a pretty long term of imprisonment for the pleasure she had of showing you her nails; the others have got off with a reprimand, either because they are very young or because they only followed a bad example."

"But surely Flora will not hear this news in the light of a

birthday pleasure!" cried Henriette. "The punishment is right, I have no doubt, and even that hideous depraved woman must acknowledge she deserves it, if she considers the matter at all. But there is so much humiliation and shame for us in the affair, for it is dreadful to know how we are hated by these work-people—and Flora is hated most of all—that I think, Moriz, it would have been better if you had held your tongue about it to-day of all days in the year."

"Do you think so?" said Flora. "Moriz knows me better—he knows that I soar higher than a mere village dame, and that I don't care one iota to be popular; nay, that I would not stir my little finger to be worshiped by the whole lot. You thought the same once upon a time. I should like to know what you would have said eight months ago, Henriette, if any one had ventured to defend the poor, or take up the people's cause in our drawing-room? You know you used to be bitter enough against them, but since Kathe's arrival the question has been so much discussed between you that really one hardly dare venture to express an opinion contrary to your changed notions for fear of being assailed with overpowering arguments and youthful indignation. I should not be surprised even to hear that our youngest sister Kathe had ordered roast beef and soup to be sent to that woman to help her keep up her strength during her punishment."

"Nothing of the kind," replied Kathe, courageously repudiating her beautiful sister's irony and sarcasm by a straightforward honest glance in her face; "but I made a few inquiries about her family, and found out she has four little children, and that her unmarried brother, who worked in Moriz's factory, and who had undertaken to look after the little ones, is very ill. Of course, these five helpless beings can not be allowed to starve while the necessary punishment is being carried out, and—and I may as well confess at once that—that I mean to take care of them till their natural protector is at liberty again, and their uncle is able to work for them."

The counselor turned away, but Kathe went up close to him, and laying her hand again on his arm she said, passionately, with heightened color and glowing eyes:

"Moriz, it is on occasions like this that the spending of my grandfather's money does not hurt me."

Mme. Urach moved impatiently on her chair; such excessive delicacy of sentiment made her feel angry; she had no sympathy with such far-fetched notions of honor.

"A very pretty beginning, certainly!" she cried out, angrily. "A fortune could not have found its way into more dangerous

hands than yours, my dear. Yes, dear Hofrath, you may well stand looking at that hand resting on Moriz's arm. It is lying there so helplessly, one would find it difficult to imagine it is the same one which determinedly throws out of window to the first poor person the money Moriz ought to be guarding for her future benefit!"

Kathe drew away her hand immediately, but not before she had had time to notice the frown on Dr. Bruck's brow, as he glanced from those white fingers on the coat sleeve to the pictures on the opposite wall.

"What nonsense, grandmamma! If Leo did glance at Kathe's hand it was not intended as a reproof," cried Flora, sharply, as she drew back a little and noticed, with some little anxiety, the changing color on her lover's face; "he was always very enthusiastic about the welfare of the people, and—"

"But not now, my dear, not now that he has been called to fill a post of honor about the court, and is such a favorite with the prince."

"And why should my present position alter my opinions?" the young doctor demanded in a quiet tone, though his voice was low and rather unsteady.

"But, good gracious, doctor, you surely do not intend being mixed up with this new democratic movement?—it would never do!" exclaimed Mme. Urach, anxiously.

"I think I have already explained many times that I have nothing whatever personally to do with the democratic societies you refer to, madame," replied the young man, gently; "I only trouble myself with matters intimately connected with every true man's duty, that is to say I take an interest in the well-being of those unable to look after sanitary measures for themselves, and—"

But he was interrupted ruthlessly by Moriz, who had been unfastening the box, and now displayed before the delighted eyes of the ladies a beautiful pale amber silk dress and a piece of violet velvet of rich quality, as he exclaimed:

"There, Flora, are two dresses which I think will help you to make your *début* in the world as the famous professor's wife."

Moriz's object of avoiding an unpleasant discussion was accomplished. Even Henriette forgot her annoyance in admiration of the lovely fan and exquisite flowers which, with head-dress and gloves, accompanied each dress and completed the birthday gift.

But the box was not empty yet.

"I thought I would bring back with me this time a little

souvenir for each of you," the counselor went on, after the dresses were duly admired and commented upon, "because I may not be leaving home again for some time, and if I do I may not be able to find what I want, so I just ordered these few little things while I was in Berlin, and gave myself the pleasure of bringing them with me. There, grandmamma, that is for you," he added, as he laid a costly lace shawl on the old lady's lap, which caused her to beam with delight.

"Here, Henriette!" and he displayed a soft white taffeta robe before the glistening eyes of the little invalid.

Then with an earnest, passionate and expressive gaze that caused her to droop her eyelids for a moment he laid in Kathe's astonished hand a handsomely embossed jewel-case.

This look startled the young girl, and revealed to her the cause for the strange, scarcely understood reserve which had lately been working within her, and which had made her involuntarily shrink from intimate intercourse with her guardian. She did not like his manner toward her, or the warmth and expression of his eyes each time he regarded her. She would put an end to it if she could, but how? It seemed to her as if he assumed there was some secret understanding between them by his daring to regard her in his strange way, and she determined it should not be repeated again. She would *not* have him look at her like that. Shame, indignation and rebellion at her will being thus tacitly subdued in the presence of others, added to maidenly reserve, obliging her to be silent, were each struggling for the mastery, and for a few moments took away from her her power of utterance.

"Well, Kathe, is it a new experience for you to have a present given you?" Flora asked. "What has Moriz chosen for you? Come, we shall have to see the contents sooner or later, so let me look at it now, child," she added, taking the case out of Kathe's trembling hands. Pressing her finger against the spring, the lid flew open and presented to view a magnificent necklace of brilliants, which glittered and sparkled on a black velvet cushion. Mme. Urach slowly raised her glass to her eye.

"Superb! exquisite! They are really wonderfully artistic and antique-looking for imitation, even if—"

"Imitation!" exclaimed the counselor, hurriedly, as the old lady reached out her hand and drew the case close to her for the better inspection of its contents. "But grandmamma, how can you imagine I would do anything so mean? Is one thread of this rich stuff of bad quality?" he asked, touching the violet with his fingers. "I never buy false jewelry or

imitations of any kind on principle—surely you know that by this time?”

The old lady bit her lip with vexation as she said, hastily:

“Yes, yes, Moriz, I know that quite well; only the richness of those stones surprised me for a moment. Why, my dear, if these brilliants are pure—and now I see they are—they are finer than anything of the kind possessed by our princess.”

“Then I am sorry the prince is not able to present her with a set,” replied the counselor, carelessly. “But, seriously speaking, I should be ashamed to give Kathe false jewelry, if for no other reason than that in a couple of years she will be mistress of such a superb fortune that she will be able to purchase as many jewels as she fancies; and then if my present had been imitation it would be thrown aside in the corner as worthless.”

“That I can well believe,” replied Mme. Urach, with cutting irony. “Kathe has a perfect passion for everything rich and costly, as we can see by the rich silk dresses she is so fond of wearing every day; but, my dear child, there is a great art in dressing becomingly, and it must be learned if you wish to make anything of a figure in the world,” she said, as she glanced reprovingly at Kathe, who was standing near the table without any apparent intention of claiming her right to examine her present. “Diamonds are not worn at eighteen; a girl of your age ought to be content to wear a simple cross at her throat or a velvet band attached to a locket—certainly nothing more expensive than a simple pearl or coral necklet.”

“You forget, grandmamma, that Kathe will not always be eighteen—or an unmarried girl,” broke in Flora, flippantly. “I know that, don’t I, Kathe?”

The young girl’s eyes flashed with anger and vexation, and she turned proudly away without a word of reply.

“Oh, how superbly disdainful our little one looks!” said Flora, laughing to try and hide her anger and confusion. “One would think I had touched upon a state secret when I teased her! Is it a crime to wish to be married, you little prude? You should not be ashamed to confess openly what you have acknowledged to in private.” Then with a sly expressive glance at the counselor she added, as she daintily held the ornament in her white fingers: “Now, really, Moriz, I must say that this necklet ought only to be worn by the wife of—a—a millionaire.”

Mme. Urach rose hastily from her seat, gathered her glasses, letter and handkerchief together, and gave an im-

patient pull to the lace shawl on her shoulders as she said, pointedly:

"I hope, Moriz, you will always be as particular in the future to buy *everything* of the genuine sort; the champagne we drank at dinner, in honor of Flora's birthday, was certainly not the best; it has made my head ache so badly I must go and lie down for an hour."

And she walked toward the door, but when she had taken about a dozen steps she turned round, and handing her letter to the counselor, she remarked:

"When my headache is better I must beg you to come to some definite decision about this," and she waved the paper in a marked manner. "Read it, and you will see for yourself that it will be impossible to refuse the baroness a second time, and not to lose her as a friend. I did so at first for peace's sake, that is, I acquiesced in your wish, but I can not be so submissive again. People of *our* rank are not accustomed to be taken up and put down at the dictation of caprice. Remember that, my dear Moriz!" and the old lady smiled grimly and with a haughty nod of her head quitted the room.

CHAPTER X.

"You will have something to do now, Moriz," said Flora, pointing to the door by which her grandmother had just left the room. "Grandmamma is equipped and armed to the teeth for fight—"

The counselor laughed aloud.

"Ah, well you may laugh, but you will see that she will not surrender one inch of the position she holds here—not a hair's-breadth will she yield to another. I have often told you, you gave her far too much power in your house; I warned you long ago how it would be—now see how you will get out of this mess you are in—" Interrupting herself suddenly she took hold of the young doctor's hand and said, in an anxious tone: "For Heaven's sake tell me what is the matter with you, Leo!" and receiving no answer, she went on after a moment: "That you are going through some inward struggle I know quite well, although you think to hide it from me. What is it? You may deceive others, but the eyes of love are keener, and me you can not deceive. Lines are creeping into your face here and here;" she touched with her finger his forehead, which had suddenly become crimson to the roots of his hair. "These fresh-grown furrows make me very anxious—you look pallid and worn, too, lately. You are working too hard. Do

you know? No, you don't—well, listen then. I shall take upon myself from to-day onward to send one of our men-servants to your apartments in town with special orders from me not to admit to your presence all those troublesome people who come to you for advice, but who once repaid your skill with ill-concealed scorn, and who worry you to death with their meanness and never-ending demands on your time."

Henriette looked up at her sister while she was speaking, with eyes and mouth open wide with astonishment, while the counselor stroked his fine beard to hide his inclination to laugh. But Dr. Bruck himself, whose face had hitherto merely expressed indifference and passiveness, now suddenly assumed a sharp angry defiance, and he laughed bitterly as he said, sternly, and in a very decided tone:

"You will do nothing of the kind, Flora. I absolutely forbid you to interfere in any way with my professional duties, either now or in the future." Then turning to the counselor, he said, quietly: "I am very much interested in one of my patients who is dangerously ill both mentally and bodily. I want to talk with you about his affairs, Moriz. Can you give me a few moments alone?"

"A patient dangerously ill?" repeated the counselor, thoughtfully, as his brows contracted into a frown, and his mouth assumed a hard compressed look. "Ah, yes, I remember," he went on, with a wave of his hand; "it must be that dare-devil Lenz. The man has been speculating to an alarming extent for his means, and he would like to put his hands into my pockets to help him out of his scrape; no, thank you!"

"Don't you think it would be as well if we were to talk it over in your room?" said the doctor, firmly. "At present we are the only two whom the man has made aware of his affairs—not even his wife knows why—"

"Well, well, I am curious to know how he succeeded in persuading you to be his mediator, but I doubt if I shall move even my little finger to put him straight again. I tell you the affair is hopeless," replied the counselor, shrugging his shoulders, for although he had himself gathered riches and wealth around him, and had formerly been good-natured enough to those struggling about him, yet now he seemed incapable of understanding the sorrows and troubles of less fortunate people. After a moment he added: "Besides, you of all people have the least reason to sympathize with the man, for you know that he too picked up a stone to throw at you not so long ago."

"Do you think that ought to affect me?" asked Dr. Bruck, from over his shoulder as he gently led the way from the room, his tall manly figure gaining dignity from the determination of his manner, appearing taller even than the counselor, whose usual elegant nonchalant manner was changed for the moment to a hesitating, somewhat shrinking, half-defiant, half-frightened air.

When the door closed on the doctor and the counselor the three girls were left alone. Flora rang loudly for her maid to take away her brother-in-law's costly present, while Kathe drew a pair of gloves from her pocket, quickly put them on, and then reached out her hand for her parasol.

"Are you going out, Kathe?" asked Henriette from her reclining chair.

"To-day is working afternoon at Auntie Diakonus's. I am already late, so must hurry away, for—" answered the young girl, unwillingly, but stopping short in her remark as Flora suddenly threw a paper box of flowers with an angry gesture across the room, scattering their contents all over the floor.

"This wonderful excess of business is enough to drive one out of their senses," cried Flora, angrily. "This 'auntie,' the very personification of duty, has refused my invitation to coffee, because, forsooth, to-day is the afternoon when all those waifs and strays of the town congregate at her house to learn to sew! as if she could not have put them off—and now, here is Kathe following suit, and gravely asserting that she too has her duty to attend to in teaching those brats!"

Then waiting till the maid had gathered the flowers from the floor and had left the room, she seized Kathe, who was also about to follow the servant's example, by the arm, and holding her firmly, said:

"Just wait one moment while I tell you that you force me to play a part for which I have very little patience. It is a long time yet to September. What is more likely than that 'auntie' will expect her nephew's future wife to make the same heroic self-sacrifice for the good of the people as she accepts daily now from you, her pattern of all that is good and sweet? She will think that I too ought to take hold of the dirty little fingers and patiently pick up the dropped stitches of a dirtier stocking till the stupid little peasant's brain has mastered the art of knitting; that I ought to wash dirty faces, stroke uncombed hair, and be willing to play at catch-catch with all the little vagabonds of the place. Bah! I should like to see myself doing it! I did try it once, but it made me sick.

And I have no doubt that the dear good woman is pouring into Leo's ears complaints of me from morning till night: how proud and haughty I am—and how heartless I must be not to love dirty children. Now for this very reason: for the reason that I don't mean to be set up as a contrast to *you*—I must beg you in future not to go so often to that house, to my future home. I won't have you visiting there as you do, and I insist—nay, command you to give up going there. Do you hear? I have a right to demand it!"

"Yes, I hear, but nevertheless I shall go on doing what my own judgment tells me there is no harm in," replied Kathe, firmly and quietly, while she wrenched her arm from Flora's grasp. "Your right, which you use so badly, I do not acknowledge as having power over me, and—"

"No, of course not," broke in Henriette, with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes.

"And I will not submit to it," continued Kathe. "If you imagine that there is treachery in every act of those around you it is a sure sign that you feel your own power is on the wane."

"On the wane?" replied Flora, scornfully, and clasping her hands in pretended amusement. "My dear little woman, my wisest of all moralizers, you make a slight mistake there. A passionate affection such as I have had cause to test severely in my lover, and which has only grown more intense in the trial, could never *now* be influenced by any one. My power is now, as ever, intact."

"Very unfortunate it is, too!" murmured Henriette, angrily, to herself, adding, somewhat louder: "I am constantly obliged to recall to my mind Doctor Bruck's former firmness of purpose in all his actions not to call him an imbecile!"

"It is only a question now of the time between this and September," continued Flora, merely noticing Henriette's remark by a sarcastic shrug of her shoulders, "and I regard the matter as an act of policy on my side toward the old lady, for I have no wish to vex her naturally. When we are settled in Leipsic all that will be changed, of course, and Leo will soon recognize that the kind of wife his aunt would have chosen for him would not only be a burden, but a drag to him. He will only fully understand my value when he sees his drawing-room frequented by people of good birth, who will consider it an honor to visit us, owing to his brilliant position and my being at the head of his house; and when he sees me filling my post with the ease and elegance natural to me, and at the same time regulating my kitchen and nursery as becomes a sensible

wife, then, and then only, will he be able to judge of my worth. I have thought it all over, and I find that with my income I shall not only be able to dress elegantly, but have a first-rate cook and a good nurse and governess if I need them, without touching one penny of whatever he may allow me for household expenses."

She looked at her rosy finger-tips as she spoke and then slowly raised her head with a haughty gesture and gazed at her reflection in the large mirror which reached from floor to ceiling. It was the face of a lovely woman, certainly, which met her gaze, but somehow not one whom involuntarily one associated with a helpless infant on her knee, or as bending lovingly over a sick-bed and whispering gentle caressing words to ease pain, not one whose natural place was the nursery, where tiny arms would be stretched out in loving welcome at her approach, or rosy faces be held up to be kissed!

Presently her glance wandered from her own face in the glass to Kathe's white-robed figure standing near the blue velvet curtains dividing the rooms, and she could not avoid noticing the fresh youthful beauty of the clear complexion and the innocent depths of the truthful brown eyes in contrast to her own more regularly beautiful features, with their worn expression and anxious, sharply defined outlines. Perhaps the contrast vexed her, for she smiled spitefully as she nodded her head at the figure in the background, and remarked:

"It is all very well, little one, but you will soon lose that violet-like modesty of yours, and you will no more care for the domestic duties and worries your beloved Lucas has taught you to consider the height of happiness than I do. Moriz won't allow you to go about the house with bundles of keys clanging at your side—of that you may be quite sure; although he may be gallant enough to promise you a dozen times over a poultry-yard, you won't be allowed to superintend it yourself! And just because he is a newly created nobleman he will be more particular about the appearance of his wife's hands than the oldest and noblest prince in the land."

Kathe flushed like a peony, and moved away from her position by the curtains, as she asked, simply and wonderingly, of her elder half-sister:

"What has that to do with me? Surely Moriz can do as he likes?"

"Flora, how can you have so little tact as to meddle with Moriz's affairs in any such way?" cried Henriette, in distress, while watching anxiously the wondering look in Kathe's eyes.

"Nonsense! he ought to be very much obliged to me for

smoothing his way for him. Besides, you know very well that I am not referring to a matter that Kathe has not known for a long time. Every girl above fifteen has that within her which instinctively warns her first and then like an electric shock assures her that she has won a man's heart. And those who will not acknowledge it are either absurdly stupid or refined and finished coquettes."

Again she looked at herself in the mirror and arranged the hair on her forehead ere adding:

"All who have eyes can see for themselves how charmingly our little one has succeeded in making herself pleasant, and how well she has played her part. *You* understand me, don't you, Kathe?" she asked, with an expressive smile, glancing under her upraised arm at Kathe as she spoke.

"No, I do not understand you," replied the young girl, her breath coming and going quickly with an undefined instinct that made her anxious, while she struggled hard to keep down the anger which Flora's tone, more than her words, had provoked.

"Come, Kathe, let us go," said Henriette, throwing her arms round her stronger sister's waist and leading her toward the door. "I will not allow such treason to be heard by you," she added, stamping her foot with rage.

"Don't excite yourself about nothing, Henriette!" remarked Flora, laughing. "Here, Kathe, you had better take your jewels and not leave them in the drawing-room, where the servants are constantly coming in and going out."

But Kathe laid her hand with a childish action behind her as Flora thrust the case toward her.

"Moriz can take them back again," she replied, shortly, but firmly. "Your grandmamma is quite right, it is not a becoming present; such jewels have no right to ornament my neck."

"Am I really to believe in such well-acted ingenuousness?" cried Flora, quickly losing her temper. "Nonsense, my dear; such pretended affectation does not become a strong robust girl like you. There is the lace shawl which Moriz brought for grandmamma; it lies there still—why? because being more exacting than your sisters—who thoroughly understand how it is that a present to you is of ten times the value of theirs—she scorns such a gift. And now you pretend that you do not know *why* such a costly *étui* is given to you! Bah! little one, don't be so absurdly silly! Have you not heard and seen the alterations going on over there in the pavilion? Every one in the house, even the lowest laborer carrying hods of bricks up

and down the ladder outside, is aware that those alterations are rooms being prepared for grandmamma's use, in order that the counselor's young wife may reign as queen in these magnificent apartments. Well, little innocent, must I speak still more plainly?"

The young girl had listened to this tirade with quick-coming breath and a dumb kind of consciousness that what she said was true, and her eyes had a frightened distended look in them as if she were watching the gradual approach of a danger she had no power to avert. But as Flora ceased speaking a proud smile flitted for a second round her pale lips, and she said, bitterly, the tones of her voice ringing strangely hard and metallic-like in their sound:

"You may spare yourself the trouble; I quite understand you at last. You have even more courage than your grandmother in causing any further stay in this house impossible on my part."

"Kathe!" cried Henriette. "No, no, you are making a mistake. Flora has been terribly thoughtless, and wanting in tact, as usual; but in this matter she intended no such allusions, I assure you. Did you, Flora?" Then clinging closer to Kathe, and looking piteously up in her face, she went on, in a half-angry, half-tremulous voice: "Why need any such silly remarks drive you away, Kathe? She only said it to tease you. Have you really been so unconscious of the existence of the love Moriz has shown you so plainly on every opportunity? Now, listen; I have over and over again wished to die—I do so still; but if I thought it possible that you would some day be mistress here in our old paternal home, why then—then—"

Kathe suddenly wrenched herself free from the soft encircling arms, and tossing back her head, her eyes flashing scorn, anger and wounded pride, while her whole girlish figure seemed to dilate with passion, she cried:

"Never! never!"

"Ah! never, you say!" said Flora, sarcastically. "Pray, then, is the match not grand enough for you, or what is it? Are you waiting for a ruined count, or perhaps a prince, to come and pluck the rose from the bush and wear it in his heart forever? Only remember that out of the fairy books in real life such things are only done for the sake of the golden fortune accompanying the rose, not for the rose itself. Such marriages are common enough nowadays, though every one knows exactly what becomes of the unfortunate wife. If you wish to be constantly reminded that your grandfather followed the plow, and that your grandmother ran about barefooted, then

marry into a family of proud descent by all means! Any way, I should really like to know what you have against Moriz, or rather why you treat the idea of marrying him so scornfully. You are certainly very rich, but we all know how you got your money. You are young and fresh looking, but you are not beautiful, my dear; and as to your musical talents, which you know how to display on fitting occasions and make the most of, they have been greatly exaggerated by your well-paid masters, who, the moment they lose their reward, will soon cease to praise you."

"Flora, how can you?" exclaimed Henriette.

"Silence, child!" Flora went on, putting the little invalid aside with a strong hand. "I am speaking to you for your good, Kathe. Do you want Moriz to be more passionately in love with you than he is? My dear girl, he is no longer a young man anxious to be the hero of some girlish romance. The chief question with you ought to be: Would you ever be chosen for yourself alone?—one can never tell in the case of an heiress how it might have been. I don't understand you; up till now it has pleased you to play the part of a watchful nurse to an extent that few old maids would have willingly done, just because no one especially wished you to do it; and now that Henriette's whole future well-being seems to depend on your staying in the house, you declare your intention of going away. For my part I shall be much more at ease, when I leave here, to know that Henriette is under your kind hands; and Leo, too, will be glad; yet you must have seen how very little he cares about you; he would rather, as you heard just now, have that spoiled, ill-tempered little wretch, Job Brandau, to plague him from morning to night than have *you* in his house, though, of course, he is very anxious about the welfare of his patient; and, as she is so fond of you, he would like you to stay with her when he leaves here for Leipsic."

Henriette did not say a word, but stood leaning her hot cheek against the wall, her mouth quivering with pain at the cruel, bitter tone of her elder sister's remarks to Kathe.

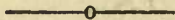
Kathe, however, on her part, had quite recovered her equanimity, and without taking the slightest notice of Flora, she said to Henriette, quietly:

"You and I know best about that; don't we, dear Henriette?" but the lips she pressed tenderly against the invalid girl's cheek were hot and trembling, and her hands were cold as ice, as she added: "You must go to your room now, darling, and lie down after taking your medicine. I shall soon be

back—I won't be away for long," and without so much as a glance at Flora she turned and left the room.

"Conceited girl! I believe she is in a rage because I do not think her a beauty, and that men like Leo Bruck do not fall down and worship her," remarked Flora, with a sarcastic curl of her mouth as the door closed on Kathe's retreating figure; and while Henriette silently took up her own pretty delicate present, and closing the necklace-case, carried it away with her to her own apartments, Flora began humming an opera melody. Crossing the corridor, she knocked without hesitation at the door of the room where Moriz and Dr. Bruck were talking, and said, gayly, as she put her head inside:

"What an ungallant pair you are to leave me all alone on my birthday!"



PART III.

CHAPTER I.

KATHE wandered for a time aimlessly about the park in order to calm her agitated feelings before presenting herself to the scrutinizing eyes of the old lady in the house by the river-side. She had no wish for "Auntie Diakonus" to see her in her present excited state, for she knew that she would question her so closely as to the cause of her unhappiness that there would be no possibility of escaping from the kind sympathy that would be shown her but by confessing the conversation she had just had with Flora; and perhaps her old friend would also think that it would be best for her to marry the counselor! They had all—Flora, Henriette, and the doctor—agreed that she ought to do it, but she would resist to the end. They were each and all selfish, but she would not allow herself to be caught in any such golden net.

In anger and bitterness she stood still for awhile and gazed at the ruin in front of her. She was tired, and had wandered round on this side of the park without taking any heed to the direction in which she was going.

The sun was fast traveling westward, and shining with broad, purple, and golden tints on the dark background of the forest, and lighting the tiny waves of the stream around the ruin with gleaming, changing colors. The huge form of the tower rose like a black marble monument from the midst of

the laughing valley, and at the side stood the thick group of nut-trees through the branches of which scarce a gleam of daylight could penetrate.

The young girl glanced across the flowing stream to one of the windows of the dark tower with a frown on her brow and an angry expression about her mouth. Inside that room stood the famous iron safe containing her fortune, which up to to-day she had been rather afraid of, but which, now as she stood there gazing gloomily at the glowering tower, she hated as the innocent cause of all her troubles. That square iron chest was to take the place of the warmest feelings of her heart—around it all the wishes and longings of her life were to be centered. Whoever told her that he loved her, she would know that he loved her iron box better. Every kindly look, each warm pressure of the hand would only mean that she was the owner of sums of money that were daily increasing in every corner of the globe. Even the rich and noble Counselor Romer, her guardian, wished to be richer still, and to possess, as his own, her large fortune. All this her half-sister Flora had insinuated, and in so doing had wounded the young girl to the innermost depth of her soul.

Kathe presently noticed that underneath, in the cellars of the towers, one of the swing windows was partially open. Inside that window she knew that the rich man kept his old and costly wine. Only a few days before, she had accompanied Mme. Urach and her half-sisters, under the guidance of her guardian, to see the new consignment of rich wine that had been ordered on one of his journeys to the capital, and had lately arrived and been placed in the immense vaults which formed the foundation of the grand old ruin. She had felt the cold air fan her cheeks, had enjoyed the earthy odor which met her as she descended the beautifully clean steps leading to the vaults. She had wondered at the exquisite neatness and cleanliness all around her when she reached the vast caves; not a cobweb crossed the roof or hung to the sides of the stone jutting. In a room adjoining the vaults, where all the glasses and decanters were kept, every article glittered and shone as bright and clear as when they were on the table in the dining-room. And then in the vault where the rarest and oldest wine was kept, stood the two famous tons of gunpowder looking so fresh and new that Kathe had laughingly remarked that they seemed to grow younger as the wine grew older, and that most likely they were touched up from time to time like the renowned spot on the Wartburg. But she did not like this corner, and was glad to get away from it, and wondered involun-

tarily how her guardian could sleep peacefully with such a dangerous enemy so close beneath his apartments.

Presently Kathe turned away and hurried back through the park in the direction of the house by the river. Several deer sprung across her path and gamboled around her, but to-day she had no bread in her pocket to give them, and she waved them away with her hand. She hurried on and soon reached the other turn of the stream, where she could easily distinguish the joyous shouts of children at play above the rush of the waters. Evidently the little pupils were romping in the garden, and as the sound of their voices reached her ears a warm happy feeling took possession of Kathe's heart, and helped to banish a great portion of the pain which had been weighing her down for the last hour. These little creatures, with their ringing laughter and innocent eyes, knew nothing about strong-boxes. They did not love her because she was an heiress, but accepted thankfully and without questioning the sweet fruit and bread she gave them, whenever they assembled together for their working lesson. They regarded her in no other light than as a kind kente lady, to whom they could pour out their childish griefs, while feeling assured that sympathy would be given them in return, or whom they could challenge to a game of play in answer to her winsome smile. No, they loved her for herself, and not for the gold her grandfather had left her.

When Kathe crossed the bridge she could not see the children as they were playing in the garden behind the house; but she met the maid carrying a basket on her arm, on her way into town to purchase the evening provisions. She, too, had a great affection for Kathe, and dropped her a courtesy and smiled a pleasant welcome to the young girl in answer to her gentle "good-afternoon."

The hall door stood wide open. Kathe slowly mounted the steps, intending to enter the house and find her way to "auntie's" room, without taking the trouble to announce her presence by ringing at the bell, as she knew the servant was out. But suddenly her feet stood still, for the doctor's voice was saying:

"No, aunt, it is the noise that bothers me—my head aches with it. When I do come here to give myself a little break in my work, I must have rest—complete rest. I need it, indeed I do," he added, in a tone of impatience, almost querulous in its sound; "I know I am asking a great sacrifice at your hands, aunt, but still I do ask you to give up these working afternoons during the remaining few months I may be coming here to and fro. During these months I will willingly hire

a room in town, and engage a teacher to take your place, so that the little ones need not be neglected, but—”

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t talk like that, Leo,” interrupted his aunt, quickly; “I had no idea that this plan of mine was disagreeable to you. Not a sound shall disturb you again; trust me, dear boy; I will give it up. There is only one regret I have in the matter, Kathe—”

“Always that girl!” exclaimed the doctor under his breath, as if his patience was beyond control, and he was too weary to conceal the irritated state of his feelings; “you never think of me now.”

“What is the matter with you, Leo? What do you mean? You surely are not jealous of the love and affection of your old aunt!” exclaimed the elderly lady, half anxiously and half laughing. He did not reply; and the young girl, standing outside on the doorstep, as if glued to the spot and quite unable to move, heard him begin slowly to pace the floor.

“Poor little Kathe! I can scarcely believe it possible that there exists a being who could object to such a sweet, innocent young creature’s presence,” the old lady went on, following her nephew with her light footsteps; “I have never known a girl who possesses so much sweetness of disposition and purity of mind, mingled with such firm determination of character and true womanly instincts, as my little friend Kathe. I am very much attached to her, for I know her worth; but I did not think that you would ever become so unjust, Leo, as not to be able to endure the presence of any other girl by the side of your superbly beautiful lady-love.”

Kathe started and trembled as she heard the doctor’s loud sarcastic laugh ringing through the open window. She involuntarily turned to flee; but a second later she made up her mind to remain where she was, and to hear how he replied to his aunt’s well-meant but unlucky speech. Her cheeks burned with shame, but she did not move.

“As a rule, aunt, you are a clear-headed, far-seeing woman, but in this instance you have failed to judge rightly,” he said, as he laughed again a bitter short laugh; “I won’t try to undeceive you—who likes to strike himself in the face? I have only one thing to beg of you, and that is, that you will return to our old habits of being with each other, while I remain here—that is, we will always be *alone*. Formerly, you were happy enough without the society of any young lady; try and be so still, aunt, for I will not have one coming and going while I am here.”

“Not even Kathe?”

A sharp rather dull sound, and a general shaking of furniture, left Kathe no doubt that this question had been met with an angry stamp of the foot.

"Aunt, shall I be forced into—" he cried, bitterly, his voice scarcely recognizable.

"Do as you will, Leo, my boy," interrupted his aunt, startled and wondering at her nephew's strange humor; "you shall have your own way. I will manage as well as I can to make the banishment as little painful to the child as possible—but good heavens! Leo, how excited you look, and your hands are feverish—you must be ill—you are working too hard. Ah, well! dear boy, you shall be quiet enough here, depend upon that. Let me get you a glass of lemonade?"

"No, thank you," he answered, quietly, as he opened the door. Kathe heard his aunt cross over to the kitchen, and a moment or two later the doctor himself appeared on the broad doorstep.

CHAPTER II.

Not a couple of yards away, Kathe was leaning against the wall, her face pale as ashes, her teeth clinched together, and her eyes staring vacantly before her; she was determined not to see the doctor as he came out.

He started as he caught sight of her, and for a moment seemed too speechless to utter a sound.

"Kathe!" he presently exclaimed in a low voice, which trembled as in one awakening from a dream.

She drew herself together and shuddered; then slowly walked a few steps away from the wall against which she had been leaning, and when she reached the center of the gravel pathway she asked:

"What do you want, Herr Doctor?"

Her whole movement was like an automaton; even as she slightly turned her head over her shoulder, it seemed as if she did it mechanically; and, but for the earnest flashing expression of her eyes, one might have imagined she was in a sleep.

The young man flushed like a girl as he went nearer to her and asked, doubtingly:

"You have heard?"

"Yes," she said abruptly, with a bitter laugh, "every word you uttered; and I was struck with the good sense you evinced in banishing from your house all strange intruders; the walls have ears;" and she moved still further away, as if she wished

to put as much space as possible between her and the threshold over which she was never again to pass.

In the meantime he had recovered himself, and now strode forward to a garden table on which he flung down his hat, and drawing up his tall figure to its full height looked straight at Kathe with an expression in his face which seemed to say that he was glad that chance had given him this opportunity, and that through no seeking of his own; he seemed to breathe freely as with a slight gesture he motioned to her to stand still.

"Fear of being overheard had no part in what I was saying to my aunt. This quiet house has no secret within its walls; and what one shuts up within one's breast has no need to fear being overheard," he began with quiet earnestness. "You have overheard what I was saying, hence you know that for a time at least I am anxious to be as much alone as possible. I am sorry to have to confess that I am so selfish; I know that you will scarcely understand me if I tell you that there are times when one's own thoughts are a curse, or perhaps it will be easier for you to comprehend the pain and agony it might be to drive those away from one's presence who could make home sweetest, and to have to flee from the one of all others one longs most to see."

She looked at him with her honest, brave eyes and saw that he was in earnest, saw that he was speaking of himself, of his own pain and agony, that was only too visibly portrayed in his white face and drawn, quivering lips; yet what could he mean?

He certainly did not flee the presence of his betrothed wife, the children at play behind the house had nothing to do with such painful emotions, so who could it be? There was no one else but herself—and herself? Ah, yes! she had involuntarily witnessed two or three painful scenes between him and Flora, and he did not like to be reminded of them, so he made the noise of the pupils an excuse to get rid of her presence about the house. And as these thoughts rushed rapidly through her mind, her features assumed a fixed, incredulous expression, and she answered, coldly:

"There is no necessity for you to give any reason for your actions, Doctor Bruck. You are master here, and of course can do as you please. But what a great amount of interest you must take in the old Baroness von Steiner, to sacrifice your love of quiet to her unruly grandson and nursery governess. You offered to have both in your house for several weeks!"

It was a hard thrust for the young man, but sarcastically

as the words were uttered, the girl herself had no idea of the sharpness of the wound she was inflicting by her bitter words.

"No, no, say nothing, not a word, I beg," she went on, passionately drawing nearer to him, and stretching out her hand imploringly as he opened his lips to speak. "I don't want you to give me a polite excuse, and say a word contrary to what you think. Do you imagine I do not know the real cause for this conduct of yours?" She gulped down the angry tears that were rising in her eyes, but her face flushed as she continued, after a second pause: "I have once or twice unfortunately crossed your path at a time when you would have preferred being quiet by yourself, and I can thoroughly appreciate the bitterness of your remark just now when you exclaimed, 'Always that girl!' I have not forgiven myself for my awkwardness, though it was only on one occasion that I willingly meddled in your affairs." Again her face flushed painfully. "But you seem determined not to forgive me, and you resent it still without any mercy."

The young man made no reply, but closed his lips with a determined expression as if to prevent being tempted into opening them. He gazed down at the girl by his side with a strange impassioned earnestness in his eyes, and clinched the hand which rested on the garden table, till the knuckles seemed to start from their sockets. Every line of his handsome face and the attitude of his whole body betrayed the secret of the man's character, that reserve and strong power over self which rarely failed him, however trying the circumstance might be.

"It was greatly against my inclinations that I returned here at all," Kathe went on, after a rapid glance at her companion's grave countenance. "The old lady there," she pointed in the direction of the villa, "poisoned my childish happiness by her cold pride and heartlessness; and the bitter tears she made my dear, kind governess shed by her impertinent manners to her I can never forgive or forget. You, yourself, were a witness to the cold reception I had from my proud half-sister when I first arrived, a reception which made me long to turn my back on the villa and take the first train home again to Dresden. Would that I had done it, too!" she added, with a strange pathos in her voice. "Added to all the puffed-up pride of position there is that horrid unbearable haughtiness of riches which seems to pervade the very furniture and air of the villa," the girl went on, "and which hinders every expression of feeling and naturalness. My whole heart and soul rebel against living in such an atmosphere. And then here,

here I found it so home-like"—she stretched out her arm toward the old-fashioned house and garden, and her face softened with a sweet yearning look—"here I could have forgotten my Dresden home, but why, I know not myself." Then her eyes brightened and her countenance glowed with inward emotion, as she went on again after a pause, "I think your dear old aunt has bewitched me. Her noble, simple appearance is an incentive in itself to try and imitate her peaceful life. She does me good, and soothes and comforts me when I am perplexed and in difficulty. She goes about her work from morning till night so gently and noiselessly, and although one rarely hears a reproof from her lips, never a harsh word, she still does more good by her example than any one I know; and whatever she thinks right she does, no matter if it is for or against the world's opinion. You can't tell how pleasant this is in contrast to the spirit of the people at the villa, where everything is sacrificed for society and appearance, even to truth and honorable dealing." And as she finished speaking Kathe knit her brows together and flung away, with an impatient gesture, a tiny branch of blossom she had snatched from a bush at her side and broken into several pieces.

This movement seemed to rouse the silent man before her into life. A flush mounted to his forehead and his eyes flashed.

"You have forgotten one virtue, my aunt, the 'dear, kind old lady,' possesses, and that is mildness in judgment," he said abruptly and sharply. "Never would she condemn another in the way you have just done, because she knows how easy it is to misunderstand another's motives for actions, and how possible it is to err in our judgment or to be mistaken in our own strength and power to do right."

He spoke sternly and with more excitement in his manner than Kathe had ever noticed before; he seemed to forget his habitual reserve and to be eager only to prove her in the wrong. Although she drooped her eyelids till their long lashes touched her hot cheeks, Kathe felt she was right and that he was weak as water in his love for her beautiful sister. His aversion to herself was unaccountable; but for this, she felt she must to a large extent blame, not him, but herself. With this comforting thought she raised her eyes and threw back her head, and was about to speak when she was interrupted by the appearance of the children.

They had turned the corner of the house, in search of one of their companions, when they caught sight of Kathe, and a moment later they sprung around her, shouting with glee and delight at her arrival. They took no notice of the stern,

grave-looking man standing near her, but nestled close to their kind friend, taking her hands, touching her dress, while one or two of the little ones held up their rosy mouths for the kiss she had ever been ready to bestow.

Kathe smiled on all of them, but not with her usual bright sunny smile. The little ones, however, did not observe any change in her, but pressed closer to her, till she seemed overwhelmed with their caresses. Ere she had time to say a word of welcome to any of them, the grave face of the doctor grew graver, an angry impatient expression escaped from his lips, and he ordered the children back to their play-ground behind the house, sternly forbidding them to appear again on this side of the garden till they were called, or had leave to come back.

They obeyed him at once after an astonished glance in his face, and a moment later Kathe and he were alone again.

The young girl bit her lip and watched the retreating figures of the children. When the last one had disappeared behind the stone jutting, she said, in a tone which betrayed a mixture of anger and sorrow:

"How willingly I would go after them, and comfort them, but of course I can not think of returning one step over the ground I have traversed for the last time."

"You would like to comfort them!" remarked the doctor, mockingly. "Do you rank me then now as great a tyrant as awhile ago you thought me weak? Console yourself! children carry their own comfort with them. Laughter and weeping live side by side within them. Listen to them now; that does not sound as if they needed comforting!" he added, with a fleeting attempt at a smile, as he pointed over his shoulder in the direction whence came the noise. "I would bet anything *that* is about me and my harshness. It was for your sake that I drove the sheep back into their pen; I could not bear to see them pulling you about like that. How can you like it yourself? The children are so badly brought up—"

"Because they love me. Thank God they do, and also that I can believe in *them* at least!" she cried out, impetuously, clasping her hands on her bosom. "Would you have me believe that *they*, too, only care for me for my money's sake, that their tender loving noisy caresses are bestowed on me just and only because of my immense fortune? No, no, I will not believe it; I am sure that they love me for myself, and I will not let myself be convinced of the contrary. It is of no earthly use to try to do so even; I *will* believe in the children!" she cried, with a piteous attempt at a smile.

He stepped back in surprise.

“What a very strange idea—”

“Why strange? Do you think it is so very wonderful, then, that at last I have been startled from my childish dream, that true warm feelings and noble aspirations were of value in the world?—awoke to learn that such things, such sentiments were of secondary importance where money is concerned? Is it nothing to lose one's confidence in all that is good, and to be laughed at for distinguishing between good and bad, truth and falsehood? It is a fearful shock suddenly to discover that all I have hitherto lived for and believed in is of no account by the side of the hollow falseness of the world.”

The young doctor silently turned his eyes from her expressive face, pale and worn-looking with the excitement of her present state, but she heaved a deep sigh and went on, passionately, after a slight pause:

“You asked me at our very first interview how I felt with my suddenly acquired riches; I am only now in a position to answer you that question rightly. It seems to me as if I had been plunged into a sea of gold, from whence no one cares to draw me for my own sake, but only for the sake of the golden waves which flow around me.”

“How came you to have such a very odd impression as that?” asked the young man in a troubled tone of voice.

“You can ask me such a question!” she replied, laughing bitterly; “ask it me when you must know that hourly and daily at the villa I am forced into recognizing the omnipotence of my wealth, and made to understand that it, and it alone, is the only thing about me worth any consideration. In my dear old Dresden home I was often caressingly called the ‘favorite of the fairies,’ but here they tell me I was petted and made much of because my old Lucas and her kind husband knew what I was worth in gold; my masters exaggerated the extent of my musical tastes for the sake of the heavy fees I paid them, and now my guardian makes love to his ward because—because of her rich inheritance.”

At first, while speaking, the excited girl had gazed in front of her over the rolling water and fields and meadows, but with her last words she looked him straight in the face, and watched him earnestly for a moment as if anxious to understand why he started so violently and shivered visibly.

“Is that a fact?” he stammered out as he passed his hands quickly over his brow. “And does it pain you so deeply that Moriz thinks thus of you?” he asked after a momentary pause.

His voice was so broken, his look so eager that she was surprised and perplexed.

"It pains me much more to hear how every one thinks that he or she has a right to interfere in the matter," she replied, drawing up her little rounded youthful figure to its full height, and unconsciously assuming a maidenly dignity of demeanor that greatly enhanced her beauty. Then shaking her head dubiously, she went on, with a bitter smile playing around her lips: "Such a poor little fish as I am, too! I have as much as I can do to keep myself from being caught in the net of selfishness, or being made into a ball to be tossed from here to there, but I will not allow it; no, I will not!" she added with energy. "And you too, doctor, you are as bad as the others. You also belong to those at the villa, who imagine that because I am a young girl without any fixed natural home, that I ought to have all my wishes and actions ruled and ordered according to the caprice of those around me, without staying to consider if I have any right or inclination to conform to these orders. You coolly banish me from your aunt's presence, and yet you would like to hang a chain round my neck and force me to remain at the villa. I should like to know very much indeed why you join in such arbitrary proceedings, or rather no—" her lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears. "I will ask you with Henriette, 'what have I done that you shun me at every turn?'"

She spoke clearly, almost sharply in her passionate eagerness, and forgetful of her lately assumed dignity, bent her head forward and raised her tear-dimmed eyes to his.

"Silence, Kathe; silence! not a word more!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, seizing her left wrist so tightly that she shrunk back, frightened at the vehemence her words had roused in the hitherto stern, proud, passive young man.

"Did I not know for certain that there is not a trace of coquetry or falseness in your nature, I should be obliged to think that you were adopting the most refined of all cruel tortures to wrench a hidden bitter secret from me," and letting go her hand he muttered, in a thick voice; "but you shall not; no, by heavens, you shall not!"

He crossed his arms on his breast and moved a few steps away from her, then suddenly turning and facing the frightened girl, who seemed rooted to the spot, he said, quietly:

"I, in my turn, should like to know to what you refer by saying that I have fastened a chain round your neck to keep you at the villa. It interests me—may I hear what you mean?" he added, as he retraced his steps till he again stood in front of her.

Kathe blushed scarlet, and for a moment hesitated, as a shy

reserved feeling made her inclined to be silent, but a glance at his grave face reassured her, and she answered, gently:

"You wish me to be—become mistress at the villa, and—"

"I—I?" he stared incredulously at her for a moment, then burst into a peal of hollow laughter, the same kind of laughter which had startled Kathe so much when he was talking to his aunt. "Why do you ask me—*me* such a question? Why should I wish to see you mistress at the villa?" he asked, forcing himself to be quiet and his voice to be steady.

"Flora told me that you were anxious that Henriette should not be left alone," she answered, with a simple straightforwardness. "You are pleased to be content with the care and affection I naturally bestow on my poor, delicate sister; and in order to assure to her the same care for the future, and to secure the counselor's house—the old family house—as hers forever, you think it would be well—at least so I am informed—for me to become—my guardian's wife."

"And you believe that I am at the bottom of such an intrigue? Do you really believe it? Have you forgotten so soon that it is, or rather was, entirely against my expressed wish that you devoted yourself to nursing your sister and prolonging your visit at the villa?"

"Things have changed very much since then," she replied, quickly and bitterly. "You will leave this in September for good, and I do not see how, after that, it can matter to you who comes and goes at the villa. Your comfort will then no longer be interfered with by a person for whom you have no sympathy—"

"Kathe!" he stammered, under his breath.

"Well, doctor?" she said, quietly, keeping her head erect and looking him straight in the face. "The reason for such an arrangement was plain enough for any one who was not as blind as I have been to what was going on around me," she added, in a tone of voice as if she had suddenly acquired years of experience in worldly matters. "One can see the reason for it all," she went on, quietly; but her lips quivered as she spoke. "The whole household arrangements could remain as they are—no stranger need enter the family. Comfort and luxury would remain in the villa, as also in the apartments up there in the tower; nothing need be altered—not even my iron strong-box need be moved from its place in Moriz's private smoking den! It was all splendidly planned—"

"And pleased you so much that you do not hesitate for a second to remain," he interrupted eagerly, his breath heaving, his whole attitude betokening angry impatience, as if he would

greedily snatch the words from her lips before they were uttered.

"No, Doctor Bruck; you are triumphing over me too soon," she cried in answer, as a sudden light broke over her sweet face, and her cheeks grew a rosy red. "I am obstinate, and do not intend remaining in spite of these charming arrangements. I am going away—going to-day even. I came over from the villa awhile ago to bid farewell to your aunt, and to tell her I was going back to Dresden; and even then I should have smiled most probably over your decree of banishment, if it had not pained me so much. My sisters have only just opened my eyes to the 'happiness' that was planned out for my future life. At the moment I felt that there was no other road for me to take but the one which led straight from the drawing-room to the railway-station, and thence home to Dresden—and I should have taken it had I not remembered in time that this was the afternoon on which I had promised your aunt to help her with the children, so I came here first to say good-bye. I shall not be away for very long, only long enough to convince Moriz that neither now nor in the future will I tolerate any other sentiment from him than that of kindly interests in my affairs, and that he neither can nor ever will be dearer to me than as the kind guardian chosen for me by my father, for whom I have great respect, but not one atom of love."

Her bosom heaved as she spoke, and her face flushed to the roots of her hair with shame. But one could see that, cost what it might, she was determined to let the young man standing before her—his eager eyes looking straight into hers with a searching glance that wrenched the truth from her almost in spite of herself—to let him know that whatever plans had been made for her in reference to the counselor, she, at least, had no intention of carrying them out, and that as far as her feelings for her guardian were concerned, she was heart-whole.

"Since that day when we carried Henriette into your house, Herr Doctor, a warm affection has sprung up on her side for your aunt," Kathe continued, avoiding his eyes as much as she could. "I was very glad of this; and awhile ago, when I resolved to return to Dresden, I meant to ask your aunt to kindly foster this love, and allow Henriette to come and see her as much as possible. But now of course all that is altered, and she would not dream of trespassing on ground from which I have been banished. I will write to 'auntie' from Dresden, for I would not go back even those few steps," and she point-

ed toward the house with a proud gesture, "after your expressed wish not to be troubled with my presence."

She turned slowly and walked quietly past him, bowing slightly as she said:

"Farewell, Herr Doctor!"

When she reached the old rustic bridge she turned to take one last look at the old house. The children were peeping round the side of the stone jutting, with wonder and astonishment depicted on their bright little faces, scarcely able to believe the evidence of their eyes when they saw Kathe move in the direction of the bridge, instead of joining them in the garden, according to her unfailing habit hitherto. They would have run over to her and shouted out their surprise at the strange behavior if they had not been in too much awe of the stern, tall gentleman leaning against the wall. Kathe's eyes wandered from the house to the spot she had just left, and no sooner did she catch sight of the doctor, holding on to the table as if afraid of falling to the earth, his face pale and his eyes staring wildly before him, than she sprung forward, dashed like lightning to his side, and, laying her warm soft hands on his, exclaimed, under her breath:

"Are you ill, Doctor Bruck? What is the matter?"

"No, Kathe, not ill; but weak—weak, as you accused me of being just now," he answered, wearily, as if waking from a dream; and lifting his hand he pushed the hair from his brow. Then he added, roughly and suddenly, bending toward her till his hot breath fanned her cheek:

"Go, child, go! Can't you see how I suffer, and that each look of yours, each kindly word, stabs me to the heart? Go, only go!" but ere she had time to obey his harsh request he stooped his head and pressed his hot, burning lips in one long, passionate kiss on the little hand which lay on his.

The girl started and turned pale, but her heart gave one great bound of joy, and a feeling of sweet tenderness for the suffering man stole through her as the words rose to her lips: "No, I will not go; you need me now."

But she checked them ere they were uttered, and glancing for a second at the bowed head and the outstretched hand pointing so beseechingly toward the bridge, she turned away hurriedly, and swift as if an avenging angel were behind her, she flew across the meadows and under the shade of the park trees, not staying her flight till she had reached the close proximity of the villa.

A few hours later, with her face concealed behind a veil and a small traveling-bag in her hand, Kathe silently descended a

side hall and left the house as suddenly and unexpectedly as she had arrived.

Henriette had shed many bitter tears, but she had unhesitatingly acknowledged that perhaps Kathe was right in thus quitting the shelter of her guardian's roof for a brief period, in consideration of Flora's great want of tact when speaking on the subject of Moriz's intentions toward her. She had also agreed to Kathe's plan of returning at once to her Dresden home, and from thence writing to explain her wishes, and she promised to announce her departure as soon as the train had gone about an hour. She kissed Kathe with a convulsive heaving of the chest, but she helped her to pack a few things together, made her drink a cup of tea, kissed her again, and then let her go, standing at the top of the winding staircase to watch her exit from the house.

When Kathe reached the ground-floor she had to employ some little address to pass out unnoticed. The gas was burning brightly in every corner of the large outer hall and side corridors, several footmen were loitering about assisting the guests, who were now beginning to arrive in rapid succession.

Once Kathe had to hide behind an immense group of flowers to avoid being seen by a beautifully dressed lady who stood aside to arrange some fault in her toilet, and while waiting she saw the drawing-room door open opposite, and Flora, magnificently arrayed in pale rose color and lace, receiving the guests assembled in her honor, with her fair false face unclouded by a single painful regret for the mischief she had willfully and wickedly wrought.

With a deep sigh but a firm tread, Kathe hurried across the side hall and out into the park; and while the maid upstairs was arranging her ball-dress and wondering why her young lady did not come to be attired for the evening festivities, she walked quickly over to the mill, knocked at Franz's window, and without giving him a word of explanation, ordered him to accompany her at once to the station, to catch the next train, due in half an hour, for Dresden.

CHAPTER III.

SINCE then three months have passed away, during which Kathe gave herself up to the study of music with a feverish passion and earnestness which she hoped would produce forgetfulness and bring its own reward—a peaceful heart. She had been kept informed of the doings at the villa by Henriette, who sent her every week a kind of diary which was written

day by day, but only dispatched to Dresden about twice a fortnight. Thus she had been able to gather that Mme. Urach had rather blessed Heaven in a grand way for her sudden flight from the villa, and that Flora had merely shrugged her shoulders and declared it was just a girlish proceeding and one not at all to be wondered at from such an impulsive young lady as Kathe. Then, too, she learned through the same source that Henriette had announced her abrupt departure to the counselor while quietly sitting in the music-room; that he grew white and angry at the news, and but for the presence of their guests a terrible family quarrel would have ensued; Flora had happily averted it by her cold indifference to family emotions, and the fascination of manner she chose on this occasion to display, to hide their host's gloom and preoccupation. Flora's lover, Dr. Bruck, had not been able to put in an appearance at all during the evening, in consequence of being called away to the bedside of a patient dangerously ill.

A day or two following Kathe's arrival in Dresden, she had received a letter from her guardian stating that before the month of June was out he would be in Dresden himself to "demand an explanation" of her "strange conduct." But as time rolled onward, Henriette's weekly dispatch mentioned the constant arrival of telegrams from Berlin, where the counselor was staying on business, without any immediate hope of his being free to travel as far as Dresden for some time to come. Thus the visit was put off indefinitely, and after awhile even his hasty scrawls grew less and less, till at last a remittance reached her for the first time through the hands of a clerk.

Kathe breathed freely at last—the conflict she had so dreaded was evidently not to take place, and her guardian had understood from her letters that he had nothing to hope for either in the present or the future. Hence she now considered that she was at liberty to return to the villa and resume her care of Henriette. But Mme. Lucas strenuously opposed any such proposition, and declared that Kathe had altered so much during her stay with her invalid sister, had lost so much color, and so much of her happy, joyous brightness, that she was sure it was best for her to remain where she was till she had become quite strong, and had regained the glooming rosiness of her cheeks. "Besides," she added, to clinch her argument, "Madame Steiner is staying, as you know, at the villa, and what with her son's governess and her personal attendants, I am sure there is not the smallest chance of your finding a spare room to sleep in."

But Kathe herself shrunk from returning to the villa until after Flora's marriage and her consequent removal to Leipsic. She knew that it would be quite impossible for her to try and maintain an outward show of peace, in the midst of the many conflicting relations she would have to pass through, if she lived under the same roof as her sisters, for the few months before the wedding. It required, indeed, all the powers of dissimulation she could call to her aid to hide from the loving eyes of her Dresden home that she had lost her peace of mind, that her heart ached, and that she had—unconsciously at first, it is true—grown to care for a man who was bound in honor and by every outward social tie to her sister, and whom to think of the world would call sin.

As yet Henriette had not urged her to return, in spite of her oft-repeated longings for her presence, but she spoke in glowing terms of "Auntie Diakonus's" great kindness to her, and of how she did all in her power to make the lonely invalid girl's life less lonely than it was. The weekly letters contained long accounts of everything that transpired at the house by the river—in fact the doctor and his aunt were the two principal personages mentioned on every page—and from the death of a tiny yellow chicken to the gathering of the grapes in the grape-house, Henriette retailed for Kathe's benefit their daily life, their daily joys and sorrows, the ins and outs of their domestic affairs, and, as well as she could, the impression all these things made on the two beings so dear to her heart. Here and there the leaves of the letter would be marked with traces of tears, especially when the subject was Flora—but not a word did she write of Flora's relations with her lover; only now and again she would burst forth into strong lamentations that the increasing practice of the latter left him very little time to visit the villa, and once that he was growing so irritable and impatient that his whole nature seemed changed.

And thus the time slipped away, till there were only a few days left before the wedding. Flora had as yet sent no invitation to her young step-sister in Dresden. "Her head is so full of all the entertainments being given in her honor," Henriette wrote, "that she seems unable to think of anything else," and that accounted for her being as "capricious as ever." "We have hardly time to breathe now, and what it will be when the wedding gayeties begin at home, I must leave you to judge for yourself, Kathe," she added, in another letter, and then went on to say that she was already worn out with the confusion and whirl around her, and that she looked for-

ward with dread to the eventful day, as she knew that "auntie" was so wrapped up in her own grief at parting with her nephew that she would be of no use to her, and on no account would she face the festivities attendant on the marriage alone. Day after day the poor girl wrote in this strain, till one evening, about three days before the wedding, Kathe received a telegram begging her to "come at once! I am very ill."

There was no refusing such an appeal. Even Mme. Lucas was forced to acknowledge that Kathe ought to go and take care of her sister at such a trying time. And Kathe herself? When she first read the telegram demanding her presence at the villa she shivered with a nervous dread of what might be awaiting her there—but her next thought was one of jubilant delight, that she would at least see him, who was so soon to become her brother-in-law, once again ere he became her sister's husband.

And so it happened that one fine September morning Kathe stood again in the old familiar Mill-house parlor, awaiting her breakfast, after traveling all night in the train. She had only just arrived from the station, where she had been met by old Franz, according to her expressed wish.

The room in which she was standing was shaded from the full glare of daylight by the rich chestnut-trees in front of the windows; the air was perfumed with the smell of roses, heliotrope, and mignonette, which filled the vases on the table and stand. A snow-white counterpane covered the bed in the alcove; and on the exquisitely clean deal table in the center of the parlor stood the old-fashioned coffee-urn, steaming hot with the welcome beverage, while a fresh-baked cake, covered with sugar, was placed by the side of a cup and saucer of rare and old china that had once belonged to Kathe's grandmother.

The floor beneath her feet vibrated with the turning of the mill-wheels in the room below; she heard the cooing of the doves through the open windows, and the splash of the water against the wheel of the turn-mill outside. She was at home in her own house, and here she determined to remain, no matter how much Mme. Urach might turn up her nose at the intercourse between the villa and the Mill-house. She would go to and fro to see Henriette, stay with her as long as possible during the day; but nothing should induce her again to take up her abode at the villa while she had it in her power to remain where she was.

The girl was very silent as she sat at her breakfast. She dreaded her first visit to the villa with a strange palpitation

of the heart that made her feel angry and vexed with herself; and a painful longing crept over her to see the old house by the river, the weather-cock of which was just discernible through the trees in the distance. But her cheeks flushed as she recalled to her memory the fact that she had been banished from that house by its master, whose grave, earnest face she had first met in the very room where she was now sitting. And then a wild longing sprung up in her heart to see him again. She could not forget him; for she knew now—had known for a long time—that she loved him with all the passionate warmth of her nature. It tortured her to know it. She struggled against it with all her strength of will, but she could not forget him.

Then she rose and went to the window, which commanded a view of the spinning manufactory formerly belonging to the counselor, her guardian. Her attention was arrested by a number of people congregated together around the public entrance, and her thoughts flew off to a conversation she had heard between two of her fellow-travelers in the train, in which one and the other alternately expressed great apprehensions of danger from the present insubordinate state of the working classes. The topic had been often discussed in her presence during the past few months in Dresden, and reference had been made over and over again to the disgraceful attempts in the forest on Flora by a few of the female mill hands, as an example of the pass things were coming to with the lower orders.

As she stood at the window Kathe heard the murmur of human voices above the sound of the cooing of the doves and the splash of the water on the turning wind-mill. She watched the crowd swaying to and fro with excited gesticulations, as on that day in the spring when the mill hands had been informed that their master had sold his manufactory to a company of stock-brokers. This company had failed, and the machines being all stopped, the workmen were in a state of agitation and anger.

“It’s always so,” said old Franz, who had just brought in Kathe’s trunk, and was now looking out of the window at her side. “The men were well off before, but they were always grumbling then. Now they have had a change of masters. See, there they are, none the better for it either; changing their horses for donkeys, and getting a bad time of it. Each hopes to gain by bad practices, but you see it won’t do; and one can hardly find it in one’s heart to blame the youngsters when their elders set them such a pitiful example.

“Honorable dealings with rich and poor, those are my ideas

of honesty," continued old Franz, gently tapping the table with his rough fingers; "and that's the best way of earning a good sound sleep every night. Those who don't understand the art of speculating, have no right to meddle with it. There's the master there, the counselor: he understands it right well, and is as safe as a trivet, because he has a steady head, cool judgment, and plenty of sense." Then, putting his forefinger to his nose, he added, knowingly: "He came back yesterday from Berlin; I saw him at the station, where I had gone with some grain. And didn't he make his two roans fly like the wind! He knows what is what, if any one does. The people down there are saying that he must have returned from some successful transaction, he looks so contented and happy. He has been a precious long time away; and he wouldn't have returned to-night if it were not the eve of the wedding, and grand doings are going on, I can tell you, fraulein."

The eve of the wedding!—so soon! Kathe had known that the marriage was fixed for the following day, and that immediately after the ceremony the young couple were to start on a journey. She had read it over and over again in Henriette's weekly letters; but now that old Franz mentioned the fact by word of mouth, it seemed as if she had heard it for the first time this morning; and in so hearing it experienced a dull, heavy, aching pain at her heart that made her catch her breath and feel inclined to cry out aloud.

"Yes, indeed, there are to be grand doings," remarked Susanne, while pouring out the fragrant coffee and handing it to her young mistress. "Only yesterday the counselor's butler was telling me that so many guests have been invited he doesn't believe there will be room for 'em all. There are to be private theatricals too, and several young ladies are coming from town dressed in costume, and cart-loads of green foliage have been fetched from the forest to ornament the stages; and there is to be dancing and charades, and fun of all sorts, as there always is, thank God, on the eve of every wedding in this blessed country. I am rejoiced you've come, fraulein, to join in the festivities. Fraulein Henriette will just go stark mad from joy, poor, suffering lamb!"

It was toning eleven by the great tower clock as Kathe left the Mill-house on her way to the villa, and a moment after she heard the clear metallic ring of the spinning manufactory clock strike out the same hour as she passed across the court-yard; but directly she had closed the private door leading from the mill to the park she found herself surrounded by a deep intense

stillness which was much more in harmony with her present mood than the chattering of old Susanne about the affairs at the villa, or the noise of the grinding machines at the mill.

Franz was right when he said that the counselor "understood the art of speculating" to a successful end. Everything around her bespoke the owner of this beautiful place as a rich man. Before her stretched a gleaming mirror of water in which the bright, sunny tints of the blue heavens above were reflected, and the lovely foliage of the trees around shaded here and there into the rich brown, yellow, and red of autumn formed a striking and exquisite contrast to the glitter and sheen of the miniature lake. This lake had been finished far sooner than Kathe had any idea was possible in such an immense undertaking, and that too was another proof of the riches possessed by her guardian. Swans were arching their graceful necks on the surface of the shining water, and on the opposite side a tiny boat was moored to the steps of a prettily built boat-house.

Wandering along under the trees, she noticed how beautifully the park was kept—not a handful of dead leaves could have been gathered from the paths—not a weed nor a blade of grass were to be seen on the cleanly swept walks, injured branches were carefully pruned away from contact with healthy ones, and even the ivy was trained to hang in graceful festoons from tree to tree, and to cling to various huge moss-covered stones laid about for the purpose. Numbers of gardeners were employed on this work all the year round, and this, as Kathe vaguely thought to herself, was again a proof of the wealth possessed by her guardian.

She wandered on, and presently turned into the winding linden avenue which led to the house. Never before had Kathe felt so unwilling to enter that fairy castle, looking so bright and gleaming in the sunlight, as she did now. Involuntarily she clasped her hands to her bosom, as she came in sight of its proud turrets and polished balconies, and the flag waving over the chimney-pots, a sure sign of the festivities going on beneath its roof. The blood mounted to her brow as she remembered that she had not been invited; yet there she was, about to enter its portals and join in the amusements arranged for others. It was a great proof of her sisterly affection that she could thus lay aside her pride for the sake of Henriette's welfare. It had required a great struggle with herself, but love had triumphed over pride, and here she was within a few yards of the grand entrance to the house she had left three months ago, like a fugitive fleeing before an enemy. Raising her eyes to

the balcony she saw Mme. Urach's favorite dog snapping and barking at every one who entered the room, and on the left of one of the windows a parrot was screaming as loud as it could, in angry defiance at the dog's howling.

When Kathe reached the hall a lady was crossing to a room on the opposite side, with a lace pocket-handkerchief held to her eyes, and evidently weeping bitter floods of tears. Kathe recognized her as the wife of an officer in the army whose extravagant dress was one of the topics of scandal in town.

"Her husband will have to pay up now—the very bed will be taken from under him," Kathe heard one of the servants say in the room of the hall devoted to the footmen; "and serve him right too! What business had an officer like the major to go speculating in things he did not understand? And there goes his wife, who has been begging the counselor to help them out of their difficulties. If he were to begin opening his purse to all those who have come to grief in this last smash, which involves the spinning manufactory, why he might as well pick up a staff and go begging himself, for he wouldn't have a penny left."

Kathe shuddered as the heartless words fell on her ears, and mechanically mounted the broad staircase leading to the rooms she had occupied in the spring. Hearing no movement within, she opened the door and went in. She noticed in a moment that the room had not been put in order for another guest since Baroness Steiner's departure. Some of the furniture had been removed, and in its place two or three long tables were standing against the walls covered with heaps of linen and articles of apparel that evidently formed part of the bridal *trousseau*. From a mahogany-tree in the center of the apartment hung a shining mass of cream-colored satin covered in part with costly lace, and ornamented with orange-blossoms and myrtle, and although it hung from a high stand, the train of the drapery lay low on the floor around for the space of several feet.

"Flora's wedding finery!" said Kathe to herself as she closed the door, and a moment or two later she found her way into Henriette's room, where the suffering girl received her with a wild scream of delight and fond words of endearment that warmed her heart and made her forget for the time being the effort it had cost her to answer the telegram in person.

Henriette was quite alone. No one had any time for her, she complained. The counselor monopolized Flora's entire attention in arranging the marriage festivities, for he was taking this opportunity of showing to the town that he knew how to do things on a grand scale, and that money was no object

to him when once he had made up his mind to spend it. Lately he seemed to have a sort of craving to spend money, and to have all the arrangements for the marriage carried out on a regal scale. Then she informed Kathe that she had not told any one about the telegram, adding, as she saw Kathé's eyes open with astonishment and her head shake deprecatingly: "It was quite unnecessary, dear; I have always told them that you would come back soon, and they ought to know for themselves that in my weak state I need you now to nurse me more than last spring." Then seeing an anxious look on Kathe's face, she comforted her by saying that there was nothing to fear from the counselor's attentions, as he had found some one else to care for in Berlin, from all she could gather. He had twice stayed away so long that on his return Flora had insinuated laughingly that he must have found an attraction there to keep him; which he had not denied, but rather, on the contrary, had allowed was a very good reason for his absence.

Kathe made no remark in reply to this communication, but she found herself thinking that perhaps the wisest course for her to pursue would be to take the next train back to Dresden. She thought Henriette looked very ill, and her hollow cough seemed to shake the frail body more often than in the spring; her hands were burning, and her breathing was much shorter and more labored than Kathe had ever seen it before. Formerly Henriette had never allowed herself to weep, but now, after a glance at her sister's face, she burst into a flood of tears, and begged Kathe not to leave her, she felt so utterly lonely and miserable.

Kathe comforted her to the best of her power, and assured her she would stay with her at least till after the wedding; but then the mention of the wedding produced another outburst of weeping, in which Henriette sobbed out her fears that Dr. Bruck would be unhappy with Flora as his wife, in spite of the love he had for her, and hiding her head on Kathe's bosom, she intimated that, although "auntie" had kept her own counsel and said nothing about the matter, yet that she, Henriette, was sure the old lady shared her fears and even blamed herself for allowing—

But Kathe cut these lamentations short by remarking that the affair was Dr. Bruck's, and his alone, that he had had ample opportunity of judging Flora's disposition during the last year, and he must now meet his fate and accept the consequences of his own acts, be they what they might.

Henriette started back in surprise as the bitter words fell

from Kathe's lips in a hard, metallic voice, but she dried her eyes and said nothing while Kathe took off her things.

CHAPTER IV.

HALF an hour later Kathe gently helped Henriette to descend the stairs, in order to announce her arrival to the rest of the family. When the two girls reached the side hall, where Kathe had hidden for a moment behind the flowers the night of her flight, now three months ago, she stood still for a second to take a peep into the large reception-room immediately facing her, from which a strange, humming monotonous sound of voices proceeded.

"They are rehearsing for to-night," explained Henriette, in a short, contemptuous tone, after listening to the sound for a moment. "How I detest all those girls! They would like to scratch Flora's face, I know, and yet there they are making fools of themselves in trying to declaim some such poetical stuff as that her brow is worthy of the kiss with which genius greeted her, and that her beauty is more beautiful than the flowers which adorn her dress, etc. Bah! I have no patience with such nonsense. And Moriz is behaving like an idiot. Just fancy what he did yesterday evening, not an hour after his arrival home! He had all the decorations taken down from the walls, because, forsooth, the workmen, like sensible fellows, had used stuff instead of silk damask to cover the hidden portions of the stage; he seems to me to squander his money in the most reckless, nay, wicked fashion. Look here!"

She pushed back one of the folding doors, in order to allow Kathe space to see into the room and look at a magnificent purple velvet canopy bordered with gold fringe, under which the bridal pair were to sit on a dais during the evening's amusements.

"How will the bridegroom's dark, pale countenance look under that costly absurdity?" whispered Henriette, with a sarcastic smile hovering round her thin lips. "She will stand near him smiling triumphantly, arching her proud neck, and dressed in the most artlessly simple white tulle robe, the effect of which has been studied for weeks. It is trimmed with daisies, the sweet innocent little flowers being considered the most fitting emblem of the feelings of a bride on the eve of her marriage. Bah! Kathe, Kathe, you can not understand how I abhor all this costly show lately—how I shrink from the sham and falseness of the life about me," cried the girl, in nervous excitement, and adding, as she clung for a moment to

Kathe's strong, supporting figure, "I seem to feel within me a sort of presentiment that some terrible disaster is about to happen, or some secret start into light like a curling flame out of smoldering ashes."

"Hush, hush, dear!" was all Kathe could answer in words, but she held her feeble sister in her strong embrace, and waited till her trembling frame had become composed before proceeding across the hall.

Mme. Urach, Flora, and the counselor were sitting at breakfast in the dining-room, when the two young girls entered. The bride-elect was arrayed in a gray, rose-bordered morning-robe, with a dainty little lace cap ornamenting her head. Kathe was startled at the sharp, worn look of the face, without the golden fringe of curls which usually ornamented Flora's forehead later on in the day, and she could not avoid confessing to herself that her lovely sister's youthful appearance had considerably lessened since she last saw her. The oval of the face had assumed a hard sharp outline, and here and there, around her eyes and mouth, traces of furrows were very distinctly to be seen.

"Good gracious, Kathe, whatever made you choose this day, of all days in the year, to come back among us, like a bad penny?" she cried, making an effort to conceal her mortification and annoyance at her younger sister's sudden and unexpected appearance. "You place me in a very awkward predicament, whether I will or will not: you must of course join my bride-maids. I have twelve already, and thirteen I will not tolerate for a second, as you yourself must quite understand—"

She suddenly checked herself, and a cry of vexation and alarm escaped her lips.

The counselor was sitting with his back to the door, and in the act of pouring out a glass of burgundy, when Flora's exclamation announced the entrance of the girls. Whether it was the suddenness of the exclamation which shook his hand, or that in raising his eyes to see who it was he did not put the glass safely on the table, no one could have said; but the result was that the purple contents were spilled over the white table-cloth and all down the side of Flora's charming dress.

The counselor sprung up from his seat with pale face, wide-open mouth, and staring eyes, as if he saw the spirit of a dead friend, instead of the tall, rounded figure and sweet, earnest face of his ward entering the room. For one moment he seemed unable to speak, the next he had recovered his self-command, laughingly apologized to Flora for his awkwardness, rang the bell for a servant to repair the damage he had caused

to the breakfast-table, and then hastened across the room to greet Kathe. Not a trace of the rejected lover was noticeable in his manner, as he quietly shook hands with her, and uttered a few words of pleasure at seeing her back in his house. His bearing toward her made her feel at her ease immediately, for one glance at his face assured her that he had again returned to his former relation with her—that of a fatherly guardian to a young ward. Laying one hand on her shoulder, he said:

“I did venture to send you a formal invitation, Kathe, and lately I have been so busy and occupied with other affairs, that a visit to Dresden was quite out of the question, even if I had had time to think of it. You will forgive me, if I—”

“I have come back entirely and for the sole purpose of being with Henriette, now she is ill again,” Kathe interrupted quickly, but without the slightest reproach in her tone for Flora’s rudeness.

“That is very nice and kind of you, my dear,” remarked Mme. Urach, the frown clearing from her brow, which Kathe’s unexpected entrance had brought there; adding, as a perplexed look settled around her mouth: “But where are we to put you? Flora’s *trousseau* is laid out in the room you used to occupy, and—”

“You must allow me to take possession of my own quarters, madame; indeed I have done so already,” said Kathe, politely but firmly.

“I see no other alternative left open to me but to accept your proposition,” replied the old lady, good-humoredly. “By this evening our house will be as full as possible—every corner occupied; and even this morning we had some little difficulty to reserve this room free for our breakfast. Really I never remember seeing the house in such a terrible state of confusion. Ever since dawn men have been at work hammering, nailing—”

“And now the girls are declaiming at the top of their voices in the drawing-room, loud enough, too, to shake the balcony from its supports,” Henriette remarked, with no little contempt in her voice, sitting down in an easy-chair. “As Kathe and I passed, just now, we overheard something about ‘Pallas Athene,’ the ‘Rose of Cashmere,’ and the newly made bride all mixed up in verse—”

“Be quiet, Henriette!” cried Flora, clasping her hands angrily to her ears. “I think it shows great want of taste on your part to tell me beforehand of such *dilettante* performances, when you know how I have always excelled in acting

myself; and now I shall have to sit still and say nothing, while others are making fun of and laughing at—”

Mme. Urach raised her hand, and by a gesture commanded her granddaughter to hold her tongue, for as she spoke the young ladies entered the room, having finished their rehearsal.

Flora glided off into a tiny anteroom at the side, while Fraulein von Grise coldly greeted Kathe with the remark that she had been away during the pleasantest part of the year, after which she turned to the counselor, and, holding out her hand, said, in affected gayety:

“Oh, how pleasant to see you here, Herr von Romer, for now we can thank you in person for the marvelously beautiful manner in which you have seconded our efforts for to-night’s amusement. It is really superb! and the decorations are beyond praise. Such fairy scenes are more fit for fairy-land than this prosy every-day world: that ball-room is simply exquisitely decorated. How pleasant it must be to be so rich! Apropos of riches, have you heard the news about Major Bredon? They say he is ruined, utterly ruined! This money panic is too alarming—first one and then another, and—”

“But Major Bredon has been speculating to a fearful extent,” remarked Mme. Urach, softly, leaning back in her *fauteuil* and arranging her dress. “How could he be so mad, so utterly wanting in common sense?”

“His wife is a lovely woman, and she is the one really in fault—she has been shamefully extravagant. Why, her toilet alone has cost more than three thousand thalers a year!”

“Nonsense, my dear; that has nothing to do with their ruin, or rather it would not have mattered if her husband had been more careful about his capital; but he speculated in things that he ought to have known were mere bubbles.” She shrugged her shoulders, and smiling at the counselor, added: “In all such matters he should have taken a business man’s advice, as I did. We are safe enough; are we not, Moriz?”

“I believe so,” he replied, with laconic brevity, filling up his glass with some burgundy, and drinking it off; “but I suppose few escape untouched in such a panic as the present one; here and there one loses a little—‘nothing risk,’ you know, ‘nothing have,’ but mere flea-bites which hurt no one—”

“Ah! that reminds me that I have not seen the paper to-day,” broke in Mme. Urach, quickly, rising from her chair. “Generally I have it brought to me punctually at nine o’clock.”

“Possibly an oversight on the part of the postman, grand-

mamma," he replied, indifferently, shrugging his shoulders; "or, perhaps, yours has got mixed with mine by some mistake of the servants. I have not opened my letters yet; they are in my rooms in the tower. I will go and see if yours is there." He poured out another glass of burgundy and drank it off, and as he put the wine-glass back on the table, he said, by way of apology for drinking so much wine: "Pardon me, ladies; out one of my headaches has just suddenly come on, and I fancy the wine may ward it off for a time. Two or three glasses of burgundy had a very happy effect on me last week, when I was attacked in a similar manner; I hope it will do the same now. Come," he added, going to the buffet, uncorking a bottle of Stein, and filling several glasses standing near; "come, ladies, my headache is better already." His face was flushed now, instead of pale and drawn. "Let us drink to the success of this evening's amusements," and he handed a glass to each of the young ladies; then holding his own high in the air, he cried: "Long live youth and beauty, and may we all live on to enjoy the happy life so pleasant to each of us just now!"

Glasses were touched all round, while Mme. Urach smiled and slightly shook her head. Kathe had drawn back into the corner and stood by Henriette's couch while her guardian was pouring out the wine. He did not seem to notice her presence or that she did not join in the toast; he offered her no glass, and she did not go forward to take one; but she saw how Henriette's eyes filled with tears at the counselor's tactless reference to a "happy life," and how her lips quivered as the clang of the glasses fell on her ear; for life to her was anything but a pleasure, with all the suffering she had to endure, when, sometimes for weeks together, the drawing of each breath was painful almost beyond endurance.

Kathe glanced anxiously and questioningly at her guardian's excited face. She never imagined that behind his pleasant manners and placid, handsome countenance an inward struggle might be going on, the result of which even he himself dreaded; but now as she gazed at his flushing eyes and heightened color, and noticed the convulsive movement of his lips, and the slight trembling of the hand which held the glass, and heard the forced ring of his voice, she was convinced in her own mind that something strange must have happened of which he was cognizant, and which he was anxious to conceal from those about him, or that he was ill.

The counselor seemed indignantly to feel the effect of Kathe's glance, for he unwillingly turned round and looked rapidly

across at the corner where the two girls were, then quickly placed his glass on the table, and passing one hand over his forehead, he held on to the buffet with the other in order to steady himself from falling, for the giddiness in his head had momentarily taken possession of him again, in spite of the wine he had taken to ward it off.

CHAPTER V.

THE preparations for the amusements of the evening on the ground-floor of the villa went on at a rapid rate, at the same time causing a noise and confusion which became almost unbearable as the afternoon advanced. The families from the surrounding neighborhood began to arrive in quick succession, accompanied by baskets full of "theatrical things," to be donned later on by the fair occupants of the carriages. The whole of the ground-floor seemed in a hopeless state of confusion; hair-dressers were hanging about the hall waiting to be summoned to the several ladies, whose costume demanded an appropriate arrangement of their hair; maids were flying up and down to answer the bells, every one of which seemed possessed with St. Vitus's dance; gardeners were coming and going, bearing large trays of hot-house grapes and other delicacies for dessert, while the under-gardeners hurried to and fro with massive pots of bright flowers, and orange and palm-trees to decorate the hall and ball-room. Footmen jostled each other in the performance of their duty in attending to the constantly arriving guests, and in conducting the right person to the right room allotted for his or her use; and in every apartment on this same ground-floor the knocking and hammering going on was almost past endurance by those whose ill-luck it was to have to wait about in the hall.

In the midst of all this noise and confusion down-stairs, up-stairs in the comparative quiet and seclusion of her own snug little room, Henriette had fallen into a calm deep sleep. In the outer chamber used by the invalid as a sort of boudoir, Nanni, her personal attendant, was sitting at work. With the swiftest and daintiest fingers she was sewing on to some airy stuff quantities of silver spangles, which the busy workmen down-stairs were to hang in graceful festoons around the wall of the mimic stage in the ball-room.

It was about half past four when Kathe softly opened the door, and passed from Henriette's bedroom into the boudoir. Stopping a moment to admire the deftness of the waiting-woman's fingers, she entreated her to watch her young mis-

tress while she slept, and not to leave the room under any pretext whatever, adding:

"And if Fraulein Henriette awakes before I return, tell her I shall be back in an hour; I am only going to the Mill-house."

Avoiding the grand staircase which led to the large hall, Kathe went down a side flight of stairs, and so across a side corridor of the dining-room. For the moment it was vacant; but no sooner had Kathe quietly tripped toward the door than she saw the counselor emerge from a second door, also leading to the garden, with his straw hat on his head, and evidently about to sally forth to his own rooms in the tower.

"There is no need to hurry, Anton," he was saying to his valet, who lived in the ruined tower with his master; "I shall not dress before six, so you will have plenty of time to ride to the town and back."

Kathe's footsteps lingered; she had no wish for a private *tête-à-tête* with her guardian just now, and she thought that in a few moments he would have left the threshold of the door and gone out into the garden. But he stood still on the top of the steps, with his hands in his trousers pockets and his back to the corridor, surveying the scene before him. One would think from the earnest expression on his face, and the yearning, almost pained look in his eyes, that the beautiful landscape at his feet, with its soft, late afternoon gleams of sunshine lighting up every branch and tree, and casting broad shadows on the paths, was being seen by him for the last time. From one point to the other his gaze wandered slowly over the whole extent of scenery before him, and then Kathe heard him sigh gently, and saw too that his breast heaved as if under terrible emotion, and that he clinched his fist in his pocket as if striving to subdue the feelings which were overpowering him, and that then suddenly he lifted his right hand to his brow and pressed it across his eyes as he had done in the morning when the giddiness in his head had attacked him.

She hurried to his side. The rustling of her silk dress made him try to turn round to see who was there.

"You have the headache still?" she asked, gently.

"Yes, it is very bad, too, and I have just had another fit of giddiness," he replied, in an unsteady voice, pulling his hat deeper over his brow. "I don't wonder at it, either, with all this noise and commotion going on in the house. If I had had the least idea of the thousand and one worries the festivities of this evening are creating, I would have stayed away," he added, presently, with a steadier voice, but with still a very un-

natural ring in it, that Kathe could not account for as simply caused by his headache. "The stupid workmen misunderstood all my orders during my absence, and executed every one exactly in the contrary way to my wishes, hence a week's work has had to be undone since my arrival yesterday, and rearranged again in the space of twelve hours. And I am afraid we shall have this knocking and hammering up to the very last moment before the curtain rises."

He walked down the steps slowly, and with the uncertain movement of a man whose vision is imperfect, he fairly reeled as he reached the ground and clutched at the iron railing for support.

"Shall I go back and fetch you a glass of seltzer-water?" asked Kathe; "or shall I send for Doctor Bruck?"

"No—no, thank you, Kathe," he answered, in a strangely weak tone; but his eyes glanced at her tall, elegant figure with an eager, devouring gaze that brought the color to his face and made him droop his eyelids for a second. "Besides, you are laboring under a grand mistake if you imagine Bruck is to be had so easily. Nothing tempts him away from his patients in town. My firm belief is that he will have to be fetched from the bedside of a patient to go through the marriage ceremony to-morrow." A sarcastic smile flitted over his pale lips, and he added, after a slight pause: "The very best remedy I have in my own hands—my cool wine cellars. I was just going over to the tower to get the wine wanted for this evening. I think the cool, fresh air down in the cellars will do me more good, and drive away my headache much sooner than any amount of medicine; it will act like a cold water bandage on my hot forehead."

Kathe gave a little touch to her hat to fix it more primly on her head, and moved forward down the steps.

"You are going to the Mill-house? Not any further, I hope?" he asked, looking at his watch.

The question was simple, and asked in a careless tone; but Kathe fancied he caught his breath while speaking, and that his eyes had a somewhat strange glare in them as he looked up for her answer.

She replied by telling him that she was going to the Mill-house, to put the finishing touches to her toilet for the evening, and nodding her head gayly she turned off across the gravel walk, while the counselor wended his way in the opposite direction toward the tower.

Kathe had reached the first tree beyond the pathway, when she involuntarily stood still and looked back at her guardian.

He was walking over the grass with the same hesitating, unsteady gait Kathe had noticed in him once before to-day; even while she looked his knees seemed to bend beneath him, and his whole figure to tremble, and his hat was pushed to the back of his head as if he could not bear the weight of the pressure on his forehead, and again the girl saw his eyes wander with a mournful but purposeless gaze around the park.

Suddenly an idea flashed through her brain and her face paled. That her guardian was ill she had no doubt; but was it safe for him to enter the wine-vaults in his present state alone? And she shuddered as she remembered her own feelings the day he had escorted her and her sisters to visit the cellars, and had pointed out to her the huge old-fashioned barrels of gunpowder, and her terror in case anything should occur to cause those barrels to blow up.

All these things rushed across her now, and she trembled as she quickly ran back and called out, anxiously: "Moriz! Moriz! do be careful with the light in the cellars!"

Was he so deep in thought, or was he in such a nervous state, that the unexpected interruption started him beyond his control? Whichever it was he turned round with a white, scared face, and muttered an oath between his teeth as he replied, angrily:

"What do you mean to insinuate? What? Ah! ha! have you seen a ghost in the sunshine, Kathe?" he added, more in his usual tone, and apparently making a great effort to control his feelings. Then he burst into a wild mocking laugh, which brought back the color of shame to the anxious girl's cheeks, and waving his hand with a disdainful gesture, he reeled forward and disappeared with hasty steps behind the copse, and out of her sight.

In the course of half an hour Kathe had completed her errand to the Mill-house, and having an hour to spare she stole away down to the side of the river to look again upon the "dear old-fashioned house" inhabited by Dr. Bruck and his aunt. How her heart beat as she caught sight of its familiar weather-cock through the foliage of the trees, and saw the gleam of the sun on the windows. How she started too at the sound of her own footfall as she slowly paced along the gravel pathway. She felt like an exile about to gaze for the last time on the beloved haunts of his happy days. She leaned against the trunk of a poplar-tree, and silently contemplated the scene before her. Here it was that she had stood still for a moment that never-to-be-forgotten day now three months ago, after her

interview with Dr. Bruck, and looked back at the house from which she had been banished.

She had not been able to forget the picture then presented to her gaze—it seemed indelibly impressed on her mind. The wondering faces of the children as they watched her departure from their position at the side of the kitchen garden, the strong, tall, well-built figure of the young doctor standing against the garden-table, the open hall door through which she had caught a glimpse of the white cap-strings of the old cook at work in the kitchen—even the glint of the setting sun gilding the window-frames and casting golden and crimson rays on the tops of the trees behind the house.

When last she had seen these trees they were covered with fresh budding flowers, now they had their branches bent beneath the weight of their golden and rosy fruit, which the bright glistening foliage could not hide. The renowned vine was heavy with the richness of its purple produce, and the very air seemed impregnated with the sweet aroma of ripe fruit. She gave a hasty glance at the corner room, and her heart beat audibly as she did so. She knew the young doctor was not at home, for Moriz had informed her that he was visiting his patients in town, but a second glance told her that he did not live there now. White lace curtains hung close to the window-panes, a beautiful white cat lay cozily stretched on the window-sill between several pots of full-blown Alpine roses, over which a lady with snow-white hair was bending, evidently Auntie Diakonus's old friend, who was to live with her when her nephew was married. He had said farewell then to his home. His things were packed, and the next morning he would stand by the altar by the side of her haughty, beautiful sister, and, "for better for worse till death do us part," plight his troth to her who had promised to be his, for the sole sake of the brilliant position the wife of a man of his social standing would occupy.

Kathe wept bitterly as she put her arms round the friendly poplar-tree, and leaned her aching head against its hard, rough trunk. Her sobs increased as she thought of the poor noble lady who had drowned herself in the river, when her heart was broken and her lover had proved himself faithless. But *she* had been loved once, even if she was forsaken for another, while poor Kathe had to confess to herself that she had not been loved at all. Then, too, the noble lady had no sin on her conscience, while, on the contrary, Kathe knew that she herself was guilty at this moment of a dull, heavy pain at her heart, which might be expressed by one very ugly word, *jeal-*

ousy; and the one she was jealous of was her elder sister! The poor girl bowed her head, and a crimson flush mounted to the roots of her hair as she acknowledged this bitter fact to herself; the very tears she was shedding seemed to scald her cheeks, but she felt too utterly miserable to try and check them. Presently she was startled by the sound of footsteps on the path behind her. Hastily dashing the tears away, she turned to see who it was approaching. It was Franz, the foreman at the mill, who was going up to the tower to look over "things there a bit," he remarked, in passing, as he touched his hat and slung his basket of tools tighter over his shoulder.

Not caring to be seen by any one else who might happen to pass by with swollen eyes and dejected air so near to the house by the river, Kathe began slowly walking along the banks. She had no desire to return to the villa just yet; there was still plenty of time for her to remain out-of-doors awhile longer before dressing for the evening. She knew also that Henriette's toilet would take long to perform, and that the invalid girl would rather spend a couple of hours in adorning her person than appear in society without an amount of finery on her thin, emaciated figure, that heightened instead of diminished the terrible inroads of the disease which was fast carrying her to an early grave.

Kathe lingered under the trees, enjoying the quiet and loneliness around her, and tried to subdue the longing yearning of her heart for just one glance, just one more look at the man she knew it was a sin to think about at all, for was he not to be married on the morrow to her sister?

And while she stamped her foot in anger at her own weakness, she saw a man coming toward her from the tower, and driving before him with a stick two small deer. He wore a thick blue workman's blouse under his coat, which was only fastened loosely over his shoulders, and his full, reddish beard reached far down on his breast. The animals trotted docilely over the bridge, but the instant they were on the other side they bounded forward into the depth of the park.

Most likely Kathe would not have noticed the man—workmen were in the habit of going to and from the tower—if it had not been for the deer. She knew that her guardian had a great affection for these animals, and that nothing made him more angry than to find one straying from their special inclosure and wandering at large in the park; and here was this stranger driving two of the shy creatures over the river to the forbidden spot! What could it mean? Was he one of those malcontent^s who had sworn enmity to the family at the villa;

and openly declared that they had no just right to the luxuries and riches surrounding them? Could he be one of a small band of rebellious workmen who, as she had heard, had determined to bring down the pride of the newly created noble, and to wrench from his grasp the wealth he had amassed?

He walked leisurely along till he reached the heavy park door, not so very far off to her right, which led on to the high-road, and taking a key from his pocket unfastened the lock and let himself out as coolly and deliberately as if he had been the master.

But while she watched the man's movements it suddenly occurred to Kathe that his gait and figure had a great resemblance to her guardian's, and that if he and this workman had both been in the same position in life they might have passed for twins, as far as their height, breadth of shoulder, walk, and general appearance went, the only difference between them being that this man had fair, reddish hair, while that of the counselor was a dark auburn, or what is commonly called brown.

Involuntarily she stood still, gazing earnestly at the spot from whence the man in the blouse had disappeared; then she slowly turned her head and contemplated the tower on the other side of the water, and half unconsciously found herself admiring the beautiful sweep of land in the distance, with the grand old ruined tower standing out in bold relief against the bright green of the trees in the foreground. Suddenly the sky overhead seemed to darken, a huge flash of brilliant light dazzled her eyes, the ground beneath her trembled, and a moment after a crash as of a heavy thunder-clap boomed in her ears, and she fell to the ground in a state of unconsciousness.

What was it? A moment or two later and all those who could possibly move ran out of the villa into the garden, for the house was rocking from the effect of whatever had caused that terrible noise. Could it be an earthquake? As if turned into stone, those who had reached the open garden path gazed at each other in speechless terror, expecting with every breath they drew that the earth would yawn beneath their feet and swallow them alive in its fearful depths. The lawn and well-kept gravel walks were fast being covered with water, which in some mysterious way appeared to have found an egress from the river-side. The air was heavy with an odor of burning, and the white, scared faces of the people standing in groups here and there began to be covered with smutches of black that, by force of contrast, deepened the ashy paleness of every

cheek, and the ground was gradually becoming strewn with remnants of burning stuffs and charred atoms of wood-work.

As the minutes crept on—and that one awful crash was not followed by a second, and the momentary violent trembling of the ground beneath their feet was succeeded by a stillness as terrible to those able to think as the crash had been unexpected—one and another began to look around to see and try and understand what it was indeed that had happened. The thick walls of the villa were cracked from top to bottom in various places, and one side of the magnificent house appeared a complete mass of ruin. The windows were all broken and their frames scattered about on the terrace; the huge massive mirrors in the drawing-room were shattered to atoms, and the stage in the room beyond the dining-hall was partly forced through the opening of what had once been a French window. How the workmen escaped with their lives and without any injury to themselves was a question that always remained a mystery, even when the cause of the catastrophe afterward became known.

Presently those standing about began to recover the use of their speech and limbs, and were joined by several people who had hastened to the house from the outlying grounds. The first to utter coherent exclamations was Anton, who had just arrived from the town, and was riding up the avenue toward the house when the fearful crash took place. His horse had reared and thrown him, but beyond a severe shake he had not been hurt, and now he came hastily forward and asked, in a hoarse whisper:

“What is it? What has happened?”

“Look! look, madame!” cried one of the servants, who, at the sound of a question from some one else’s lips, seemed to recover very rapidly from his own fright. He was helping to support old Mme. Urach, who, half fainting from terror, was leaning heavily against Flora. “Look, madame, over there!” and he pointed in the direction of the park.

By this time a large number of people had assembled in front of the house, each eager to hear what it was that had happened, and at the man’s loud exclamation they all turned round and looked in the direction to which he was pointing.

Thick clouds of black smoke were issuing above the trees, their density relieved every now and again by a flash of red lurid light which leaped like a gleam of lightning through the overhanging darkness.

“The gunpowder in the tower must have exploded!” cried a voice in the crowd.

"Not possible!" cried Anton, laughing, in spite of his terror, at the bare idea of such an absurd thing happening. "That powder long ago lost its power of exploding, and the small quantity the master brought with him fresh from Jux was not enough to raise a stone out of its place. What nonsense you talk, man!"

But for all that he called it "nonsense," his face assumed a pallor that was not there a few moments ago, as he remembered that his master was then in his rooms over there, where nothing was to be seen of the tower for the dense columns of smoke darkening the horizon; and as the thought rushed through his brain he turned and darted off through the park, not heeding the wet, overflowing pathways, or answering the questions of the crowd who followed his footsteps as fast as their feet would carry them.

What a scene of desolation lay before them! In the space of a second the beautiful estate had been converted into a heap of black ruin! Turn which way one would, all was charred, destroyed, and converted into a mass of rubbish. Scarcely a tree remained standing. On the right, the noble avenue of lindens which led from the tower to the entrance of the neighboring town presented an aspect of torn branches and upturned roots that was piteous to behold. Massive blocks of granite had been hurled across the road, and large pieces of half-burned wood lay side by side with huge stones on the well-kept paths. On the other side, what had once been the elegant palm-house was now a mere empty shed covered with thousands of broken bits of glass, and all the handsome stables and their costly occupants seemed to have disappeared under the blackened, seething ruins which still cumbered the ground.

No wonder the crowd as they pressed forward held their breath with horror at the scene of devastation around them. Scarcely a trace of the grand old tower remained! The beautiful balcony of ancient workmanship which the counselor had had redecorated at great cost, and which was the pride and glory of the surrounding neighborhood, had disappeared altogether. The thick stone walls, gray and beautiful with age, were torn and rent asunder and black with smoke, and from the roof of the tower volumes of smoke still issued, lightened every few moments by darting fork-like fits of flame. It was impossible to approach anywhere near the burning mass for fear of some falling stone or heavy buttress that dashed itself to the ground with renewed force from time to time.

"My poor master!" murmured Anton, stretching out his hands toward the burning ruins, which were fast becoming one

immense yawning cavern, containing nothing but smoke and the charred remains of what had once been the counselor's luxurious and costly apartments.

Round about the base of the tower, water was gurgling and splashing against the stone walls, and covering the ground as far as to the opposite side of the park. The same shock which had destroyed the tower and desolated the whole estate had burst the bounds of the river and caused it to overflow its banks, and as it sunk back into its deep bed after a few moments' agitation it carried with it sand and roots, and wounded doves, and masses of broken articles of every description.

Every moment brought fresh faces to the ruins, but what could they do? The fire-engines from the neighboring town were quickly on the spot, but help was too late—everything was lost, there was nothing to save. Who would be foolish enough to expect to rescue exquisite furniture, costly sculpture, famous pictures, rich carpets, or carved ornaments from that burning crater? One rich crimson silk curtain had caught on the lower portion of one of the walls and hung there like a great spot of blood from a gigantic wound.

And while they stood there watching the burning ruins, the people began to whisper among each other of concealed treasures—of gold and silver hoarded up within the vast caves of that blackened ruin. Yet no, it was not money but money's worth, some one remarked, who appeared, from the expression on his face, of a more intelligent turn of mind than many others there present—papers of enormous value, securities, mortgages, and such like things, which had been placed inside those once massive walls, and hidden in heavy old-fashioned iron chests, knowing that there they would be safer than in any bank. Where were they now? Where were the walls which had formerly protected them? It was useless to ask; all was engulfed in that frightful yawning cavern, or scattered in a thousand useless fragments to the four winds.

What, too, had become of the master of all this enormous wealth, who, according to Anton's statement, had entered the tower about an hour previous to the catastrophe for the purpose of drawing wine for the evening's feast? Many a blanched face peered hopelessly into the burning embers, holding their breath, while the faithful body-servant bemoaned his master's loss, and every now and again rent the air with a piercing call on his master's name, running hither and thither, now calling over the water, then raising his voice still louder, with a despairing accent of entreaty, as if the counselor were there and needed coaxing to be persuaded to leave the ruins.

"How could any one be so foolish as to enter a vault with a light in his hand, where gunpowder in large quantities was kept?"

"But that historical gunpowder could not have exploded of itself—it had been there too many hundred years; some more must have been added to the old," remarked one of the bystanders in a loud voice—an engineer too, who was known to most of the crowd present as a man able to speak with the authority of knowledge and learning.

"Then how the devil did it get into the vault?" asked Anton, standing still for a moment and eying the speaker with suspicion, his haggard face looking still more haggard and worn, with the fresh idea of doubt and suspicion raised by the engineer's manner visible in his countenance.

The gentleman did not reply, but shrugged his shoulders, and drew back out of the way of the fire-engine water-pipes, which had begun to work on the side near him. Engine after engine arrived in answer to the summons from the bell in the nearest church tower, but too late to rescue things from destruction, so several of the men left off applying the water-pipes and gave a helping hand to raising a new temporary bridge over the river in place of the old one, which had been completely blown away.

Presently a wild cry arose from the midst of the crowd around the ruined tower. Not very far from the spot where the men were at work on the bridge, the body of Franz, the foreman at the mill, was discovered, lying mangled and dead, half concealed by a large stone which had evidently fallen upon him when the explosion took place and crushed him.

Mme. Urach heard the cry from a bench under the trees in the garden, where she had sunk down exhausted and frightened, after escaping from the house when the shock took place. She had been unable to move a step further; she seemed thoroughly unnerved, and to have no power to understand even what had happened.

The cry raised by the people near the tower seemed to rouse her; she tried to get up, but her limbs refused to obey.

"Moriz, have they found him?" she murmured as one in a dream. Then making a great effort she asked: "Have they seen him? Listen, Flora! listen to that cry; he is not dead, is he, dear?" she demanded, as she seized hold of her granddaughter's arm, who was standing near her, and looked up piteously in her face.

It was a sad scene that Flora gazed round upon in her usual thoughtless manner. In the distance, over the trees, clouds of

black smoke circled up to the sky; in the park, under the trees, the ground was flooded with the overflowing river; and near at hand, in the large open space in front of the villa, thousands of broken pieces of glass strewed the lawn, over which hung the balcony filled with beautiful flowers, rich sweet orange-trees, and bright-colored plants—perhaps the only part of the house which had entirely escaped injury. At the bottom of the lawn several small streams of water, supplied from the constantly playing water-pipes, had formed themselves into a miniature lake, which was muddy and dark-colored from the sand and other floating *débris* mixing with each stream as it passed over the ground, and joined the others in this sloping portion of the estate. Not one of the trimly kept garden-paths was visible to the eye; even the far-famed avenue of linden-trees was littered from one end to the other with torn branches, blackened fragments of granite, and upturned roots of trees. In the midst of this desolating scene Flora stood, robed in white, with white flowers in her golden hair, her cheeks and lips as white as her dress, and her demeanor as calm and collected as though she were gazing on a scene of ordinary interest, instead of on the complete ruin and destruction of everything the family possessed in the world.

Her lip curled indignantly at the visible sign of weakness in her aged grandmother, who had always impressed upon her granddaughters the worldly wisdom of never, under any trying circumstances, losing their self-possession, and now seemed utterly helpless herself in the confusion reigning around her. Why need Flora trouble about a few panes of broken glass, or the blowing up of an old ruin that her brother-in-law had fitted up at great cost, and made habitable for himself and servant? On the morrow she would start on her new career as the wife of the most celebrated physician of the court. It was tiresome, certainly, that all this strange tumult, the grave results of which she had not as yet cared to inquire into, should have occurred on the eve of her wedding, but—

“I wish you would let go my arm, grandmamma!” she said, impatiently, in answer to the old lady’s eager questioning respecting her grandson-in-law’s safety. “I think you must have lost your wits, and fancy you see phantoms. Why need Moriz have met with an accident? Bah! what an idea!—he, too, who is always so lucky! I am perfectly convinced that he is as safe and well as I am, giving orders to those thoughtless servants, who seem to have completely forgotten our existence, and who are screaming and flying about down there as if they were mad, and I have no doubt do not see their master a yard off.

I must go and see what they are making such a noise about." She glanced over the wet lawn and still more flooded garden-path, and then at her light shoes; but after a second's hesitation she lifted her tarletan skirt with a despairing shrug of the shoulders, and said:

"I dare say they will think I have lost my wits also, but I must go."

"No, no; you shall do nothing of the kind; you remain with me," cried Mme. Urach, in a beseeching tone, catching at the folds of Flora's dress and holding her back. "You surely don't mean to be so heartless as to leave me alone with Henriette, who is more helpless than I am, and can not stir herself, poor child. Oh, God! I shall die, I think. If he is dead—if—ah, what then?" and the poor old lady drooped her head on her bosom covered with sparkling diamonds, and seemed to have aged in appearance twenty years since the morning. Her yellow satin dress was a strange contrast to her ashen-gray face and decrepit attitude.

Henriette had cowered down at her grandmother's feet, her face as pale as her sister's, while her large eyes wandered from one side of the scene of desolation to the other, as she constantly muttered:

"Kathe! where is Kathe?" and her lips trembled and the words were spoken as if it were a lesson repeated by rote.

"Good gracious me! I shall lose my patience soon," Flora murmured between her teeth. "It is terrible to be thus hampered with such helpless women. Really, Henriette, I must entreat you to cease that eternal moan for your Kathe. No one will steal her from you, no fear of that."

With increasing impatience she glanced up at the house to see if there was any one at hand to take her place, and stay by her grandmother and sister while she followed out her inclination and walked over to the tower to hear what had really happened. But not a human being was within calling distance. Every one had gone off to the tower—visitors, footmen, servants, even dainty ladies'-maids had tucked up their petticoats and waded through the rushing water across the park to the scene of the disaster. Turning her head in the direction opposite to the one leading from the town, she saw two or three ladies, who were to take part in the private theatricals of the evening, coming toward the spot where she stood.

"For God's sake, tell us what has happened!" cried the foremost young lady, as she neared the group.

Flora shrugged her shoulders.

"There has been an explosion in the tower; that is all wo

know at present. Every one has gone mad, no one will give a lucid answer, and here am I tied to this spot because grand-mamma has lost her head, and in her exaggerated anxiety about Moriz is tearing my skirts from off my body. She has taken it into her head that he is blown up too."

The young girls seemed to turn into stone at this terrible conjecture and at the heartless cold-blooded manner in which it was uttered. That the handsome, healthy man who had so gayly challenged them to drink to the toast of a "long, happy life" not a couple of hours ago could be reduced to a mass of fragments was a fact they could not realize at a moment's notice. They were too horrified to utter a sound, and all Fraulein von Grise could bring her lips to pronounce was a feeble:

"Impossible!"

"Impossible? you say impossible?" exclaimed Mme. Urach, with an hysterical laugh and a sigh as she rose to her feet, and while tottering as if drunk, pointed in the direction of the park. "There! there! They are bringing him! My God! my God! Moriz! Moriz!"

A group of people were advancing toward the house, carrying a form on a stretcher improvised for the occasion, in the midst of whom Dr. Bruck's tall figure could be distinctly seen. He was without his hat, and his face was very pale.

Flora sprung forward, while her grandmother burst into a flood of tears. As soon as they recognized the white-robed bride-elect, and divined her errand in thus hurrying toward them, the men who were carrying the stretcher drew back and allowed her to step to the side of the motionless figure on the board. One glance sufficed for her purpose, and then she in her turn drew back and cried out to her grandmother:

"Be comforted, grandmother! It is not Moriz."

"Then it is Kathe—I knew it was," murmured Henriette, in an awed whisper, that sounded as if it came from beneath the ground, so hollow and unnatural was the tone of her voice.

And she was right. It was Kathe who was lying on the plank, her clothes dripping with wet, and her head supported by soft pillows taken from the doctor's study. But for the linen bandage on her head and a few drops of blood on her left cheek one might have supposed she was asleep, her lids were closed so naturally, and her hands lay so unconstrainedly on her lap.

"What has happened to Kathe, Leo? How on earth did she get wounded in the explosion? What did she want down there at all?" asked Flora, stooping over the prostrate figure,

and evincing far more anger than sorrow at her young step-sister's misfortune or accident, whichever it might turn out to be.

The young doctor's face flushed scarlet at his betrothed's first question, but he controlled himself, and, pressing his lips firmly together, made no attempt to answer, and looked past her to the spot where Henriette was crouching down, too horrified and terror-stricken to move.

But the sound of Flora's voice seemed to bring back her scattered senses; she rose from her huddled-up position, and holding the doctor's arm, she whispered, as well as her short breathing would let her:

"Only one word, Leo; is she alive?" and her large eyes looked imploringly up into his as she tightened her grasp on his arm.

"Yes; the fresh air and loss of blood have saved her; the only danger now is from her wet clothes. Thank God the wound on her head is not dangerous," he replied, with a deep sigh of intense relief, and he put his arm gently and kindly round the weak girl's waist and half carried her up to the house, after he had ordered the bearers of Kathe's lifeless form to precede him.

The crowd followed for a few steps further, then quietly dropped off, one by one, to return to the more exciting scene of the disaster. Mme. Urach, who had scarcely recovered sufficiently from her anxiety about the counselor to take much heed to what was going on around her, allowed herself to be led back to the house without any open remonstrance. The girls who were to have joined in the theatricals followed behind, watching with wondering eyes the young doctor's behavior, who appeared to be unable to notice anything but Kathe's fainting form. Still holding Henriette round the waist, he walked by the side of the stretcher, with his free hand laid gently on Kathe's forehead to judge if the movement of the bearers was causing her any pain. The usually shy, reserved man, who lately had been graver and more reserved in manner than before, watched each breath of the wounded girl with a tender solicitude and all-absorbing gaze as if she were all the world to him, as if the dearest and best-beloved being the earth and life contained for him had just been rescued from death by his preserving hand.

Flora followed behind, silently and alone, as if she had no relationship with the three figures forming the center of the group in advance. Her feet and skirts were wet, and the latter trailed along the damp gravel pathway, becoming dirtier

and heavier with each step, but she took no heed of anything. With a sudden rash movement she snatched the wreath of daisies she wore in her hair from her head, and mechanically tore them to shreds with her fingers, as if angry at the irony of fate which had brought her into such a strange position, in a toilet that was intended to adorn her person at the moment of her greatest triumph in life.

She also appeared wrapped in her own thoughts, and noticed no one as she slowly walked along but the tall imposing figure of her lover. She waited from moment to moment, expecting him to turn round and come to her side; but she was doomed to disappointment, and she followed on step by step with an eager angry light in her eyes, till they reached the threshold of the door. Her grandmother spoke to her, but she did not appear to hear; she turned neither to the right nor left, took no heed of those who pressed around her, but with that same angry gleam in her eyes which was there in the park, followed her lover up the steps, into the hall, even as far as the first floor, and into the room where Kathe, still unconscious, was gently laid down on a bed by the young doctor's strong arms.

CHAPTER VI.

THE night which succeeded to this day of horrors was one long anxious vigil for every one in the villa. No one went to bed, the gas was kept lighted in all the rooms, the servants went about on tiptoe or stood whispering in groups in various corners, and each time the night-watchman's step was heard tramping on the gravel path, or a door upstairs was softly opened, every one of them would start and run to the hall door hoping and expecting against hope that it was the master's arrival; but the night wore away and the morning light dawned through the windows—and still he did not come.

The sun rose clear and bright, and shone unimpeded into every room on that side of the house, for no one had thought overnight of drawing curtains and pulling down blinds before glassless window places, now glistening on a million of broken pieces of mirror strewn the floor in one apartment, and then flashing golden rays across the decorated ball-room, now a complete mass of ruin, kissing the crimson velvet of the canopy into a glorious flush of color, and warming the pale tints of the orange-blossoms of the bridal-dress through the rosy gauze of an overhanging festoon.

The velvet and gold and silver decorations, rare Venetian glass and luscious fruit were lying side by side in the dining-

room in hopeless confusion. One shock, and the fairy scene had been changed into a tangled heap of fragments that was piteous to behold. Verses were left unspoken, and in the room where gold-winged angels were to have uttered high-sounding praises of the queen of the evening, and fairy feet were to have flitted through the mazes of the bridal dance, the cold morning wind moaned through the broken walls and rattled the fragments of the window-sills to and fro in restless monotonous impatience.

It was perhaps this morning, for the first time since the villa had owned a master, that the sun had been able to peep unabashed through the unclosed shutters and wander in free delight to every corner of the large and costly furnished room belonging to Mme. Urach, stopping to play for a moment round about the silk curtains of her carved bed before darting to the other side, and dancing over the amber skirts, and flashing a thousand brilliant lights from the diamond necklace the old lady still wore round her throat.

With loose cap strings, and disheveled hair, and torn lace, Mme. Urach rose and slowly began pacing up and down the floor. She was aged—older in reality than those people supposed her to be who merely saw her dressed of an evening—and yet the one thought which occupied her mind now had occupied it all night, to the exclusion of everything else, and which had excited her to such a degree that sleep had been out of the question; this one thought, framed in coherent words, was, “Who was the counselor’s heir?” She was aware that she herself had no claim to anything that could be saved from the general wreck, not even to the bed on which she slept, or to the cup from which she drank.

The counselor had been early left an orphan, and, as far as she knew, he had not a relative in the world, unless a poor sister of his mother’s, whom he had often assisted, was alive still. Would she be his heir? He had no children, and if this poor, obscure person, who had helped to support herself by sewing to eke out the miserable pittance her unfortunate husband had contrived to leave behind him—if she were to become heiress to all this colossal wealth, then it would be very hard—very hard—indeed, for the old lady and her granddaughters in the future. For Mme. Urach and Flora and Henriette were only relatives by marriage to the rich counselor, and having no claim to his property, he having died without a will, they would be forced to leave the luxury around them, and go and live in an obscure lodging on very straitened means. The old lady shuddered as she reflected that she

might be forced to go without softly lined carriages and high-bred horses; that she would no longer be waited upon by finished servants, or be able to tempt her failing appetite with all the delicacies of the season, and that the princely entertainments she had so long presided over would take to themselves wings and fly away.

Two or three of the gentlemen living in the neighborhood had remained with the old lady till midnight the previous evening, and although this same vexed question had not been referred to in plain terms, yet the conversation had naturally fallen on the consequences likely to accrue from the loss of the many valuable papers and documents known to have been placed in the strong-boxes in the tower, and of which not one shred or fragment could be found, or even expected to be found among the ruins.

But, even if the bulk of the counselor's immense fortune had been blown into the air, would not the contents of the villa itself realize a sum of considerable value?

The house had been shaken and most of the glass destroyed by the shock of the explosion, but the iron room had not suffered, and that room contained the costly silver, which in itself was a small fortune. Besides, the most valuable of the horses, the half dozen thorough-breds, whose quarters were on the side of the villa furthest from the tower, had received so little damage—in fact had scarcely felt the effect of the explosion at all; and they would sell for a sum worthy of a king's ransom. And the pictures and other works of art—all, all would realize a sufficient fortune to enable Mme. Urach to enjoy to the end of her life the luxuries she was accustomed to, if only she could prove that the same blood ran in her veins as in her late grandson-in-law's, Herr von Romer!

The conversation had also turned on Kathe, who was lying upstairs in Henriette's room.

The papers concerning her enormous fortune had also been kept in the tower, and the gentlemen had spent some little time in discussing the probabilities of its complete loss; but Mme. Urach had paid no attention to that part of the conversation; what did it matter to her that the castle miller's ill-reputed wealth had disappeared?—all she thought of was: "Who was Moriz's heir in point of law?" And when she retired to her room the same question revolved in her mind, to the exclusion, as we have already said, of every other thought or interest.

And Flora? Late on the previous evening she had crossed the upper corridor and ascended the grand staircase, with

anger and bitter vexation expressed on her beautiful face. To her deep and intense indignation she had been forced to play the part of a person who was not wanted in the so-called "sick-room" upstairs. Besides Henriette, who had curled herself on a sofa and obstinately refused to leave Kathe's presence till consciousness returned, "Auntie Diakonus" had taken quiet possession of the room, and installed herself as head nurse. She had been obliged to seek shelter at the villa, for the house by the river-side had been terribly shattered by the explosion, and the south wall so undermined, besides the roof being completely blown off, that it would not have been safe for a human being to remain in it. Fortunately, she and her friend were far away on the high-road when the shock took place, and the maid was in the garden, out of reach of falling stones, or perhaps all three would have met their death by the falling of the roof and the breaking in of the south wall.

Early in the evening the young doctor had sent for his aunt, told her to request her friend and their servant to seek a night's lodging at the Mill-house, and begged her to send one of the watchmen to guard the house, while she herself came and attended to Kathe, who would require tender and careful nursing for the next twenty-four hours. She had obeyed her nephew's direction and then taken up her position at the head of Kathe's bed, to wait and watch for the return of consciousness, weeping bitter tears the while. Every now and then she broke out into half-stifled expressions of fear that the "apple of her eye" would never recover from the effects of a wound on her head, in spite of the young doctor's constant assurance that if she were only kept quiet in a few hours she would open her eyes and recognize those around her.

On the other side of the bed Dr. Bruck sat on a chair, holding Kathe's hand, which he quietly laid on the sheets each time he thought it necessary to change the cold-water bandage on her head. Such an amount of attention to and interest in the granddaughter of a wood-cutter's daughter irritated Flora beyond endurance. The gentle whisperings between "auntie" and nephew, regardless of her presence, made her so indignant with the latter, added to the persistent way in which he ignored her very existence near him in the room, that she proudly retired, and sought the shelter of her own apartments, wherein to vent her anger and rage unobserved.

She, like the rest of the excited household, had no thought of going to bed. She changed her white tulle dress for a becoming dressing-gown of cashmere and gold, put her cold feet

into dainty velvet-embroidered slippers, and threw herself down on the sofa to try and calm her excited nerves with an hour's sleep.

Although her favorite room had miraculously escaped all damage from the explosion but one cracked pane of glass, the apartment was in a state of confusion from one end to the other. The ebony writing-table was strewn with odds and ends of papers, and every drawer open and empty. Packages of various kinds were lying on the carpet; books had been taken from their places on the shelves, and were piled in careless disorder in one corner of the room, evidently waiting to be packed in the empty cases near at hand. The usual soft-tinted light of her crystal lamp was missing from the room, and on the table stood a bronze bracket of wax-candles, which one of the servants had hastily placed there, the flickering, uncertain light of which seemed to add to the confusion in the elegant but untidy apartment.

When the morning sun had risen high enough to penetrate the recesses of her room, Flora rose from her recumbent position, extinguished the candles, and sent a message to Dr. Bruck to the effect that she wished to see him. Five minutes later she heard his firm tread crossing the hall. She gave one hasty glance at herself in the glass, arranged a stray curl under the lace cap she had placed on her head, and then laid her pale, marble-looking face on the red cushion of the sofa, drew her cashmere dressing-gown closer around her, and anxiously gazed at the door through which her lover would enter.

He opened the door, and there was something in his quiet, dignified manner which she had never noticed before, and which made her involuntarily rise from the sofa to greet him, as if he had been a stranger whom she had never seen before.

"I am not well, Leo," she began, hesitatingly, unable to withdraw her gaze from the pale, handsome face before her, which seemed to have gained a new beauty of expression since she last saw it that she could not quite understand. "My head aches, and I think that yesterday's excitement and my feet getting wet have given me a chill and made me feverish," she added, as he looked at her with the calm scrutinizing gaze of a physician.

The calm look irritated her, her face flushed and her lips trembled with the effort she made to control her feelings, as she said:

"Take care what you are doing, Leo! I have been very patient for these last three or four months, during which you have been so wrapped up in your patients that you have had

no time to spend with me at all." Shrugging her shoulders, she went on: "But then, I suppose, that will be my fate; and I am prepared to submit to seeing very little of you, and I comfort myself by knowing that the more devoted you are to your profession the greater the fame attaching to the name I am to bear." And she turned her head slightly from one side to the other, as if she already saw before her the chief portion of the society over which she was to shed the luster of her future husband's fame. Scarcely noticing the color which mounted to his brow, she continued: "But the moment there is anything the matter with me I protest strongly against your outside patients being considered first. We are all more or less suffering from this fearful explosion, and—poor me!—I had to comfort and sustain grandmamma, and Henriette into the bargain, while half dead with fright myself—they were both as helpless as babies. And yet you have not once thought it worth while to inquire how I bear the shock we had yesterday."

"I did not inquire because I knew you to have such control over your feelings that you would not have allowed any such weakness to overtake you as to be frightened under the circumstances; and then it only required one glance at your face to convince me that your nerves and body were as sound and undisturbed as usual."

The tone of his voice was the same as ever—quiet, ringing and deep; but the beautiful woman noticed that his breath came quickly and with difficulty, as if his heart were beating faster than usual.

"You are wrong in your latter surmise, for my temples are throbbing and my nerves are upset; but you are right as regards the first. I never lose control over my feelings; or, if I do, I recover them as quickly as possible, so as to be in a fit state to act with some amount of reason. If I may judge, however, from your tone, you do not seem to admire that quality in me, although you ought to be glad I possess it to-day, of all days in the year, especially when I tell you that I have never allowed myself to be persuaded into speculating with the capital of the solid but small fortune papa left me. If I had been in the habit of letting my feelings run away with my discretion when I was in Moriz's rooms at the tower, I should stand before you to-day a penniless bride—my portion would have shared the fate of the rest of the paper fortune, and have been blown up. Don't look so shocked, Leo," she added, lowering her voice; "I have not been duped, and I call things by their right name. Grandmamma is tearing about

upstairs and wringing her hands, because this princely estate is likely to pass out of her hands into a stranger's. Our amiable guests have been bemoaning and bewailing the fate of Dame Fortune's favorite child in such a tragic death, till I left the drawing-room late last night in disgust, for I say that yesterday's theatrical departure from this world had been arranged for some time. Yes, you may stare; but there was a whisper afloat yesterday among the workmen that Moriz's affairs were in a desperate condition, and very shortly—perhaps even to-day—the whisper might have been changed into certainty, and our merchant prince, the noble counselor, proclaimed not only a dishonorable speculator, but a villain!"

It would be impossible to describe in words the tone and manner with which this terrible assertion was made by the beautiful woman. She had risen from her sofa and was standing in the center of a crimson carpet, the soft white draperies of cashmere falling around her, the sunlight heightening the golden tint of her hair, and with one hand outstretched to give force to her words; the same attitude, indeed, in which she had stood long months ago, when, in reply to the counselor's defense of Dr. Brock's surgical skill, she had said: "I am not so weak as to hide his faults to myself."

Flora was right when she said that she liked to call things "by their right names." She had just put into plain words the thought that had vaguely haunted Dr. Bruck's mind since yesterday—a thought that he would have shrunk from accepting as possible, even within the secret recesses of his own heart—and it pained him excessively to hear from those womanly lips, in hard, undisguised terms, a truth which it would have been better and kinder to have left untold. The generosity inherent in the man's nature resented with silent scorn the unwelcome boast that she, the petted and spoiled sister-in-law, "had not been duped" by the counselor's extravagance and lavishness in the preparations for her wedding.

"I am unfortunate this morning in the choice of my words," she went on, after a momentary pause in a half-sarcastic, half-conciliatory tone, as she went toward him, he having turned off to the window without answering her. "Everything I say seems to displease you. Perhaps I have spoken out a little too plainly for your sensitive feelings, and you think that I might have spared his memory the reproach, considering the kindness he had conferred on me?" Shrugging her shoulders and raising her brows, she added: "It may be so, but then you see I am a sworn enemy to the weakness of trying to gloss over faults that are patent to every one who

has a grain of sense; besides, I have sufficient reason for being angry and indignant with Moriz. Henriette is as poor as a church mouse; he speculated with every penny of her income; and Kathe?—you may rest assured that not a farthing of her enormous fortune will be found.”

“Thank God!” exclaimed the young doctor, under his breath, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, while his face was momentarily suffused with crimson, and he smiled softly to himself.

Quietly as the words had been uttered, Flora’s quick ear caught them.

“Thank God?” she repeated, with no little astonishment depicted on her countenance, smiling and clasping her hands together. “I confess I am not remarkably attached to my young half-sister, but what has she done to you that you rejoice in such a strange fashion over her misfortune?”

He bit his under lip in vexation, pressed his forehead against the cool pane of glass before him, and did not reply, while she gazed out into the garden and watched the sunlight gleam on the stone nymph of the fountain.

“Kathe will not be as badly off as Henriette, after all,” resumed Flora, thoughtfully; “the mill and Mill-house belong to her, and they are worth something, and the former will bring her in a nice little income yearly. She can go and live there as soon as matters are settled here, and I should think that Henriette’s best plan will be to live with her. The two are very fond of each other, and the poor consumptive girl would be a terrible drag on grandmamma. I can’t imagine a better arrangement; can you? I should not dream of burdening you in our new home with such an invalid as Henriette. Kathe will be her best protector and nurse, and she shall go to her.” Suddenly clasping her hands round his arm, she looked up tenderly in his face and said: “Ah, Leo, how I shall thank God when you and I are married, by and by, and we drive away this afternoon together, leaving all this confusion and sorrow behind.”

With a passionate movement and a sternness of expression that she had never seen before in his face, the young doctor wrenched his arm from Flora’s grasp and said, in a hoarse voice of deep emotion:

“Would you really have the heart to leave your family helpless and alone at such a terrible time as this? Go then where you will, I shall remain here.”

“Leo!” she cried, then became speechless with the bitterness of her mortification as she saw that he was in earnest.

She put her hand to her heart as if she had received a stab in the side, and bit her pale lips to keep the angry words which she was tempted to speak unuttered. "You surely are not aware yourself of the import of your rash words," she said presently in a compressed tone. "I only notice them at all in order to point out to you that unless we start on our wedding-tour to-day, as was originally intended, before the news of this terrible misfortune gets abroad—and no one will be inclined to blame us for accepting our happiness an hour or two earlier than the hour fixed for the ceremony—we shall be obliged to defer the marriage for an indefinite time."

He was silent, even morose, as he stood a short way from her as if turned into granite. This silent immobility irritated her, and as the seconds ticked on and still he uttered no sound her large gray eyes flashed with anger and her lips quivered with passion.

"I have already told you that I am prepared to give up a great deal to the demands of your patients on your time; but remember this, Leo, I will not submit to the mere caprice of any other ladies. I neither care nor wish to understand why you think I ought to remain here and go through all the trouble and annoyance of winding up affairs here with grand-mamma and Henriette, when I can retire to the charming quiet and comfort of the home you have promised me. Surely you do not expect me to make such a sacrifice? Besides, does it lie in my power to alter the pass things have come to? Of course not. Why then need you suggest anything so disagreeable? Do you wish me also to become an object for pity? No, no; a thousand times no; rather than subject myself to that I would prefer leaving the house on foot."

She began pacing the room with excitement. After taking perhaps a dozen turns she stopped suddenly, still waiting for him to speak, but he was still silent. Then, knitting her brows, she went on:

"You have not given me the slightest reason for your staying here, as you say you intend doing. You can not plead the need for your presence upstairs in the sick-room. Henriette was to have been left in any case, and as to Kathe, after your statement yesterday that the wound on her head was not dangerous, you can not declare now that she requires your constant and continued care. To tell the truth, I could scarcely refrain from laughing last evening at the enormous fuss you and your aunt were making over Kathe. That Henriette, who is ill and nervous, should shed childish tears over a few drops of blood I can understand; but that you,

Leo, should condescend to treat the strong, robust descendant of a wood-cutter as tenderly as if she had been a born—"

She checked herself suddenly as Dr. Bruck quietly turned round and raised his hand warningly to stop what she was saying. She laughed bitterly.

"Do you think I am afraid of you? I tell you that I reply to that very unbecoming movement of your hand by an answering warning, and say: Take care what you are at, Leo; I have not yet said the irrevocable 'Yes' at the altar. I have it still in my power to withdraw if I choose, and place you in the uncomfortable position of a forsaken bridegroom. I repeat again what I said just now, that the absurd fuss you made over Kathe yesterday vexed me excessively. Won't the world laugh at me if you pay as much care and attention to her as if she were a princess, and—"

"No, Flora, not as to a princess, but to the darling of my heart, my first and only love," he said, in his deep, ringing voice, not so much to her as to himself.

She started as if the earth had suddenly opened at her feet, an ashy pale color blanched her cheeks, and involuntarily raising her hands, she stood rooted to the spot with astonishment.

Not a muscle of his face moved as he stood before *her*; he also raised his hands, but he made no attempt to draw nearer.

"That which I have hitherto succeeded in hiding within my own heart because I felt it was a wrong toward you, and a false shame made me feel I was morally weak in the matter, I must now confess openly to you. I know now, and God only knows how I have struggled against it, that I have passionately loved Kathe from the very first moment I saw her." His voice shook, and he slightly turned his head to the window away from her.

Flora let her hands fall to her side. Unexpected and startling as the position was in which she was placed, she could not believe her ears had heard aright. Recovering the self-possession she had momentarily lost, she felt vexed with herself for having evinced any sign of astonishment or fear.

She had often enough in former days flirted with her partners at balls, and accepted with a smiling, pleased countenance the homage they were only too willing to pay to the beautiful woman whose loveliness of face and form had captivated their hearts, and it had many a time happened that she had laughed at and unmercifully dismissed with a taunt the man whose heart she had won and then broken, if such a thing as a broken heart exists, when he urged his suit or pleaded that she had led him to believe she cared for him. But that a man should

dare to flirt with *her*, and then break his word, was simply impossible! The very idea was absurd; no one in town would believe it, and she herself last of all.

Much more likely that Dr. Bruck had at last summoned up courage to revenge himself a little for all she had made him suffer. She knew she had tried him to the furthest point of neglect that even she dared to venture upon, that she had hinted to him not half an hour ago he was not to be sure of her till the final "Yes" had irrevocably been uttered, and this had so vexed and annoyed him, so she thought to comfort herself, that he determined to punish her by making her jealous. And her inborn vanity and frivolous nature kept her blind for a few moments longer to the bitterest delusion of her life. Curling her lips and crossing her arms, she said, cuttingly:

"Ah, indeed! the very first moment. Then that must have been the moment she entered the hall like a peasant, her shoes all covered with dust, and that very Arcadian-looking bundle, tied up in her handkerchief, hanging on her arm. Was it so?"

She might have seen, had she chosen, how each one of her scoffing words made his blood boil, and how it hurt him that she could thus make fun of a feeling which had cost so many hours of hard struggling with himself before he could make up his mind to inform her of the fact at all. But he subdued his rising anger. The question which concerned them both so closely must be discussed between them; that it should be done in a manner worthy of respect, was his to decide.

"I had accompanied her to the villa. I saw her first at the Mill-house," he replied, after a momentary hesitation.

Flora's cheeks flushed crimson with surprise, her eyes glittered, and she bit her lip.

"Ah, indeed! Now I begin to understand. And our simple-minded little sneak was interested in keeping that fact to herself. A fair beginning, I acknowledge!" she laughed, aloud. "Well, what next, Leo?" she asked, folding her arms tighter across her bosom and stamping her foot impatiently on the ground.

"The tone you think fit to adopt, Flora, leaves me no other alternative than to address you on the subject in writing," he said, coldly, anxious to avoid a scene; and, scarcely feeling able to master his indignation, he moved toward the door.

She sprang forward and barred his passage.

"For Heaven's sake, don't be so in earnest, Leo! I was merely playing a part of your own comedy. So you wish to

wage a pen-and-paper war with me? My dear Leo, you will be worsted if you do. Let me warn you in time not to attempt any such thing, however much practice you may have had in writing prescriptions."

The smile she had forced to her lips died away as she encountered the somber and stern expression depicted on his face. For the first time she began to comprehend that he might be in earnest—bitter earnest; not in his declared love for her young step-sister—that was an utter impossibility—but in his determination to break off his engagement to her at the last moment rather than put himself in the life-long position of being obliged to submit to her caprices and heartless behavior. Her bosom heaved as the thought passed through her mind; but she still clutched wildly at the hope that he would not dare to mortify her in the eyes of the world by any such decided step. She glanced again at his face, set her teeth, and then said, haughtily, as she moved aside to allow him to pass:

"Go, Doctor Bruck! The look you gave me a moment ago is more than I choose to submit to. Go, I beg of you. I will not move my little finger to keep you; no, nor utter one syllable to ask you to stay." Bursting into a mocking peal of laughter, she added: "Men are noble creatures, certainly! There was a time, not so many months ago, when I went on my knees and begged for my freedom to be given back to me, but it was refused, and I was caught more firmly in the net, held faster than ever by the chain which linked us together. Now see and learn what a poor weak woman's soul is capable of—pride—"

"It was pride which made me deaf to your prayer for freedom—indomitable pride—but a very different thing to the mixture of self-consolation and anger that you exhibit and call pride," he interrupted, in a quiet, masterful tone and manner, although he had not a trace of color left in his face. "I acknowledge that I was wrong—very wrong—to indulge it, and I will make no attempt to palliate my fault by empty apologies, or to defend my actions by pointing out to you your own short-comings. What I did then was the result of a certain boast I had unwittingly made a law to myself, that I, by pure strength of will, could accomplish whatever I had set before me to do; that if once I had made up my mind a thing should be I would allow no obstacle to stand in the way of its fulfillment. I would not give you back your freedom for this same reason; also because I considered that, having once passed your word to be my wife, you were bound to eternity to keep it, as I, on my side, was bound to keep my faith with you. I

never broke my word in my life. I had promised to marry you, and that promise had to be kept; and from this point of view I regarded our betrothal as sound and binding for life as the Catholics regard marriage vows. I will not deny that this was a remnant of my student days' enthusiasm. That evening you begged for our engagement to be broken, when you informed me that you had no affection for me—that you hated me—I told you in reply that I would not give you back your freedom, because I had no intention of joining the ranks of those whom you had harnessed to your triumphal car of victory over men's hearts in order to prove the fascination of your beauty, and then be left on the road to die when you grew weary of your triumph. I confess again that this was not right of me, because in acting as I did it is not so much the honor of the man which is compromised by the results of such conduct as that of the woman."

She turned away with a burning flush on her cheek, and began drumming with her fingers on the table. For a moment her bosom heaved, certainly not with emotion or sorrow for the loss of the lover, the only one of the numerous admirers for whom she ever felt the slightest approach to affection, but with mortified pride. After a slight pause she said, haughtily, without turning her head toward him:

"I did not conceal from you that my hand had been sought times out of number before I engaged myself to you."

"I know you did not; besides, I heard it from all my friends. You know, too, that you were the ideal of my youth while I was at college; and afterward when I joined my regiment, I was constantly hearing of your triumphs, and I could not resist the thought rising in my mind that it would be a very grand achievement to win the heart of the celebrated beauty who had refused every man who had yet aspired to obtain her hand, and—" He checked himself, for he had no wish to add to her vanity by describing the fascination her beauty had for him before he saw her, or to wound and mortify her by reminding her of the coquetry she had employed to win his hand and heart, when she saw the position of social rank he attained by his brilliant achievements during the war.

"And did you flatter yourself that you were the only one of all my numerous admirers whom I loved?" she added, when he paused.

"*Loved?* No, Flora, not one of them—not even me," he cried, passionately. "You have only loved one person in your whole life, and that one is the beautiful, graceful, talented Flora Mangold."

"Ah!" she said, with the softened ring of regret in her voice, "the usual flattery of a lover I have sadly missed in you. Even if you caressed me you never had a word of endearment for me, and now—now in the bitterness of this hour, you paint me in colors that even I, vain and egotistical as you say I am, can not fail to be satisfied with."

He blushed like a girl as he looked up at her. He knew that many weeks, even months, had elapsed since he had kissed the soft, curling lips of that beautiful woman before him, and yet that he had kissed them at all seemed to him now a wrong toward the other pure, sweet girl whom he had learned to love with all the passion and earnestness of his nature. He turned his eyes away from the face before him which was smiling at his confusion, and looked out into the garden.

"Leo," said Flora, suddenly going over to him and putting her hand on his arm, "Leo, did you come down here just now for the express purpose of being hard and reproaching me?"

"You forget that it was you who sent for me," he replied. "I should not have come of my own free will, for both girls are ill upstairs—Kathe is still unconscious and Henriette's state makes me very anxious—without your expressed wish to see me at once I should not have left them, and certainly in the midst of all this confusion and trouble I should not have dreamed of coming to the decision your words have so unexpectedly provoked."

"What decision?" she said, quickly. "Surely you have not taken in earnest my rather childish anger of a few moments ago, when I told you to go? A woman's passing caprice is not to be treated with sober earnestness like that."

The blood mounted to his brow—by her unmerited reproach she had brought matters to an unexpected crisis. Standing still, he said, with ill-concealed impatience, as if irritated at her persistence in ignoring the truth of their strange position, and his voice had a passionate ring in it which startled her:

"I have no wish to blame you in the matter—I would not presume to do so. I—I forced myself to remain true to—"

"Ah, yes! You made an observation just now in reference to the force of your will; has it—your will, I mean—failed you?"

"Failed me? No, it has not; only acknowledged that it was directed into the wrong channel. Flora, I told you long ago that in refusing to withdraw from my engagement to you I had acted on a false basis. I knew then—had known for

some time—that you had not one atom of love for me. As I said before, you never cared for any one but your own richly endowed beauty, although you made me believe at first that you—loved me. Bah!—and then I soon found out that the enthusiastic admiration I had for your lovely person had not extended to my heart—that you never touched. You were, and are still, my ideal of female beauty of face and form; your face is perfect; your form faultless, but your nature is cold, calculating and selfish. I soon learned with bitterness that while you would be an ornament in my house as my wife, you would never bend yourself to be my companion—the sweet, attractive center of my home, around which love and peace, not worldly ambition and praise, would hover. The love I hoped to win in your heart was not there to give. Mine is a passionate, warm nature, and it was a bitter trial for me when I woke up to the consciousness that I had to look forward to a loveless marriage—a marriage in which not one sentiment of tender feeling had any influence. You looked forward to reigning in society as queen of my drawing-room. You did not care whether I loved you or not, and you accepted my reserve and coldness without question or interest as to their cause. Flora, we both made a mistake—have both done wrong. You never cared for me with any feeling of affection—”

She was silent—she could not look him in the face and tell him he erred in his surmise, for she knew that love, in the sense he referred to—true, devoted, self-sacrificing love—she had never given him, never could give to any one. Her eyes wandered carelessly over the red carpet; she did not wish to meet those searching, grave orbs of his which she felt were reading her through, and she would at the moment have given a great deal to have been able to look boldly up in his face and contradict his statement.

“And then it was I clung obstinately and reluctantly to the letter of my word—the more faithless I was in my heart toward you the more—”

“Ah—well!”

“Yes, Flora, you may believe it or not, as you please; but I did fight the battle—I did wish to be true to you.” A deep breath relieved him, and then he went on: “I fought against my love for Kathe as if I had been fighting with my deadliest enemy. Flora, the very first moment I perceived how dear she had become to me I was hard and severe with myself, and with the girl also who had crept into my heart. I repulsed her simplest action. I would not have the flowers she had

thoughtlessly placed on my table in my room—she had gathered them and laid them there, not for me—oh, no! but while helping my aunt in some household duty. She liked coming to my house; but I avoided her presence as if she had been the plague. I was cold, even rude to her, and fled away from the sight of the face which charms me more than any other face I ever saw—”

“That is very likely; a doctor’s eye is sure to be attracted by a healthy, round, red and white face like hers—Dame Nature’s choice country production!” The reserve which prevented her looking in his face awhile ago had vanished now; she drew up her head, and, pressing her clasped hands against her bosom, continued, sarcastically: “And you think it necessary to inform me of these details? You think I wish to know how this unsophisticated maiden threw flowers into the room of the man she wished to attract.”

“Stop, Flora!” And he raised his hand with a gesture which intimidated even her, and obliged her to stay the words she was about to utter. “Overwhelm me with reproaches if you will, I will not attempt to dispute them, but say one word against Kathe, and I will defend her in a way you would not wish to see me adopt. Not once has she knowingly tried to win my love. She went back to Dresden ignorant of my feeling toward her, ignorant of her own. Why she went at all you know best. While, on the one side, she was being urged into marrying a man for whom she had not a particle of love, on the other, she was plainly made to understand that she ought to give up her room willingly for the sake of a noble visitor who had not a hundredth part as much right in the house as she had. I was a witness to this unkind behavior, and I had it on my tongue, when I saw her lip quiver and her cheek flush with the insult, to tell Madame Urach, in a few bitter words, what I thought of her heartless conduct. But I had no right to interfere, and then, when indirectly I was asked to have her in my house, I did not dare to accept the temptation, knowing what I did—how passionately I loved her. An hour later, unknown to me at the moment, she overheard me entreating my aunt to give up Kathe’s friendship for a time, and to find an excuse for preventing her coming to and from the house while I remained in it. And so she went away, wounded and sore in her deepest and truest feelings, and I was cruel enough, nay, more, wicked enough, for the sake of a false principle—for the sake of the false, duty-enthroned idol I called honor then, but which now I know was nothing of the kind—to let her depart without telling her that the lie I was acting

to the world and to you, Flora, was only a lie, and that my heart was hers entirely and forever."

For awhile he paused, overcome with the emotion his words had called forth. Flora threw herself down on the sofa, laid her head on the cushions and pressed her soft hands against her ears, as if she wished to shut out the sound of his voice; but he went on, unheeding:

"Yes, I let her go, and then I breathed more freely, and told myself that my struggle was over, and that now at least I should be at peace—fool! fool that I was! I might have known that the moment she turned her back I should be assailed by a fiend who would torment my existence beyond endurance. It was not the exigencies of my profession which kept me away from society here and made me reserved and morose when surrounded by the presence of the other one so much as the deep terrible longing I had for a sight of her sweet face."

He left the window niche where he had been standing, and began slowly pacing the room, while Flora rose from her recumbent position, shook back the disordered curls from her forehead, and said, with an ironical laugh:

"You longed to see Kathe? Well would dear papa understand now, if he were alive, what he could not comprehend years ago—the true instinct of his eldest girl, which caused her to rebel against calling the miller's daughter 'mamma'—which made her turn her back on the new-born baby—Kathe, you know—and passionately cry out that she had two sisters and did not want any step-sister! You need not call the foundation for your past actions a 'false principle.' Oh, no! For the sake of this very false principle thousands of lies are enacted by people who are pleased to call themselves not only respectable but honorable—indeed, you need not excuse yourself—"

"Flora, you have no right to sneer in any such way," he broke in. "I hoped that you would accept my decision without forcing me to remind you of things I would rather not refer to." His voice was hoarse with emotion, but he determined now to bring matters to an end between them. "I do not excuse myself. I know I have done you a great wrong, and yet you oblige me to remind you again that in the evening of the day you were attacked in the forest you told me distinctly that you hated me—and why? Because I hinted that you had talents, but not genius, and that it would be better if you gave up writing on a subject which you were not in a position to understand. No, listen—you shall hear me,"

for she made an attempt to interrupt him. "The day after this candid admission on your part, I became aware that your hatred had changed into a deep attachment for your neglected lover, in consequence of his having been advanced to a post of honor at court, and having received from the hands of his sovereign, as a mark of gratitude for a slight service rendered, an order which you informed me made me a marked man for life. And I accepted your change of feeling as silently as I had received your assertion of hatred, and let the yoke remain round my neck, because I wished to be what you sneer at—respectable and honorable. I would have acted this abominable lie to the end of time if it had only concerned you and me—if I had been the only one to suffer in the loveless future before us. But there was another—we were not two, but three, and of these three human beings one would have gone to the altar and pronounced the inevitable 'Yes' without one pang of remorse at the misery she was entailing by that act, without one thought of anything but the position before her in the world—while the other two, separated by that fatal word as surely as if the poles divided them asunder, would yet have been one in heart and thought, and would have loved on to—"

A cry of rage interrupted him.

"Has she dared to raise her eyes to her sister's promised husband—the hypocrite! Has she told you then that her deceitful heart is yours? Traitors both of you!" she hissed rather than spoke.

He started, the color forsook his cheek and lips, and his eyes flashed in scorn and anger; but he checked his anger and said:

"You may say what you will, but no words of yours can possibly calumniate in my eyes such a fair modest character as Kathe's. I have not heard a word from her lips since that afternoon I drove her from my presence. I did not know she had returned yesterday. I had escaped from the noise of the rehearsals, and the confusion of the hammering and arranging here, into the quiet of my own garden, when I suddenly saw her standing on the opposite side of the rustic bridge, not daring to cross over the spot she loves so well, because I had banished her by my hard, cruel words." He hesitated and paused, and the color rushed to his forehead. He would not tell her how it was that the assurance came to him that the weeping girl at the bridge loved him—enough that he himself felt sure of it.

"As soon as I could collect my senses after the explosion in the tower I rushed through the park seeking for her," he went on, after he had subdued his feelings sufficiently to speak

himself; "and when I found her lying on the ground, and had convinced myself that she was yet alive, I felt sure that death had passed her by in order that I might be happy with her at last. And in that moment the scales fell from my eyes, I recognized the right of my heart to speak for itself. I saw the folly of the sin I was about to commit in marrying one who did not love me, and for whom I had no feelings of affection; and there and then I determined to brave the world's opinion, and declare myself a 'respectable' hypocrite."

During the utterance of the last sentence or two Flora's manner had completely changed. She had played for high stakes and lost; but she was not a woman of the world for nothing. The cold calculating brain had grasped the fact that her influence was nothing by the side of the subtle power of the passionate love the young doctor had avowed for Kathe, but she was not daunted. She smiled back at him with a cat-like glitter in her blue eyes, while she snatched the lace cap which had fallen from her head, and placed it deftly on the top of her hair. Drawing the soft lappets under her delicate chin, she knit her brows, and with a satanic smile, which startled him with its look of malignity, she said, with slow emphasis:

"Indeed, and without asking my leave, Herr Doctor? Well, do as you like! Listening to you just now I could not help asking myself the simple question—what should I have done by the side of such a very sentimental, romantic person? It is just as well that things are as they are, for both of us. I give you back your word, as one does freedom to a bird with a string attached to its foot, one end of which one holds in one's hand." She just touched with the tip of her finger her betrothal-ring. "You are free to win the sweetest and most winsome girl in the land, even my most devoted friend, if you like, and I will, myself, hand her over my ring here—but not to Kathe; I forbid that. Do you hear, Doctor Bruck? If you fly over the seas with her or hide yourselves in the most obscure village beyond the mountains, I shall appear before you at the altar and forbid the marriage."

"Thank God you have no power to do that," he answered, pale as death, with a deep breath.

"You think not! Well, wait and see if you will obtain your wish, if you can realize your sinful will; I think you will find *I can* prevent it. You are a faithless, miserable traitor, and not worthy of the rich perfumed plant you have cast aside for the sake of a paltry field daisy! Bah! you will hear from me again!" and with a light wave of the hand in sign of fare-

well, and a mocking, ringing laugh, she swept him an elaborate courtesy, and passed into the inner apartment, shutting the door behind her.

In the anteroom leading to the corridor the young doctor was met by a servant, who in a low voice said:

"Fraulein Henriette is very ill, sir; her maid sent me to fetch you, and to tell you that she has had a bad fit of coughing and has now fainted; will you come at once, sir?"

"I am coming," was the short answer, in a tone of such sad depression that the man went down into the servants' hall and reported that Fraulein Henriette must be "going to die," the Herr Doctor seemed so "cut up" on hearing that she had fainted.

CHAPTER VII.

THE oldest resident in town could not remember an occurrence which had so startled and excited the population of the town and neighborhood as the explosion in the tower, and the consequent death of the counselor and the foreman at the mill.

The two days following the catastrophe were spent in bemoaning and lamenting the rich man's unhappy fate, and in expressing sympathy and sorrow for the loss of such a very magnificent patron as the late counselor had been to the townspeople; and then terrible whispers began circulating from mouth to mouth as to the solvent state of the millionaire's affairs at the time of his death. The extensive alterations going on in the villa had been undertaken by contract, and on partial and hasty examination it was discovered that no security of any value had been given by the counselor for future payment when the elaborate and expensive work was finished. The contractors looked at each other and shook their heads, and when the hours rolled on, and the suggestion of the engineer on the day the explosion took place, that the old gunpowder would not have exploded unless a large quantity of fresh material had been added to it, assumed the form of certainty, then it was that reports began to circulate implicating the honor and upright dealing of the wealthy merchant. It was a very ugly fact that a large quantity of explosive substance should have been stowed away in a vault right under the room where the late owner of such an enormous income usually kept the papers and documents and books relative to his business affairs. Why the powder should have been placed there at all was a mystery many tried to solve. They had not long to wait for the solution. On the third day confidentia

letters arrived from Berlin, where as yet no one had heard of his death, giving an account of the immense losses the counselor must have sustained in the rash speculations he had been indulging in lately, and how, in consequence of the panic in the money market he had recklessly endeavored to retrieve certain of his heavier losses by speculating largely in the opposite direction. How he had been able to conceal his losses was another question, which people in town discussed freely when the news from Berlin reached their ears.

Not even his confidential agent, the accountant at the spinning manufactory, had the least idea that he had been speculating beyond his means. Evidently, as one man observed to another, the rich man had had the happy rare good fortune of throwing dust in the eyes of those who were keenest in searching for faults in their rich neighbors' actions, or he could not have held on so long. And if what was darkly hinted was true, and he had committed the terrible crime of blowing up the silent witnesses to his disgrace and ruin, then again he had been fortunate, for, after all, it was only surmise, and he might have been in a position to recover his losses by the sale of the valuable antiquities and pictures he had collected together in his rooms in the tower. But he had lost his own life with his fortune, and however much he might have sinned against others there was no evidence left to prove it, since the tower was completely destroyed, with every letter and document it contained.

While the catastrophe and its consequences were occupying the minds of people in town, sadness and sorrow reigned in the villa. The day following the explosion many intimate friends of the family hastened to the house to hear for themselves all about the terrible misfortune which had happened, and their subdued voices and hushed footsteps had produced a sort of confusion among the servants that was very trying in its results to one of Flora's impatient nature. The next day a painful oppressive silence took possession of the house, visitors were denied entrance, and most of the windows were temporarily boarded across to keep out the cold, and wind, and rain; thus causing a dark gloomy half light in the rooms, and making the outside of the dwelling look as if it had been deserted.

News of the counselor's loss of fortune had not yet reached the ears of Mme. Urach, whose whole thoughts were concentrated on the probable value of the villa and grounds, and who was likely to be its future possessor. With the egotism peculiar to old age she gave no heed to the death of the counselor.

or to the sorrow which might arise from such an event among his friends. All she thought of was herself, and the selfishness inherent in her own and her granddaughter's nature never, perhaps, displayed itself so conspicuously as during the few days succeeding the blowing up of the tower.

In a few short words Flora had informed her grandmother that her engagement to Dr. Bruck had been broken off, without referring in any way to the cause of the rupture, and the old lady had so far been roused from the train of her own thoughts as to express surprise and astonishment at the unexpected news by shrugging her shoulders and uttering a few sentences of vexation. After all, the change in her grandchild's life was not half so serious, to her way of thinking, as the terrible state of her own uncertainty respecting her future. That she, an elderly lady, might suddenly, at any moment, be plunged into the horrors of existing on a miserable pittance, after living all these past years in princely affluence and luxury, occupied all her attention. She hastily dismissed Flora from her room, and begged her to devote her energies to the looking over and sorting of any papers of value she had in her possession relative to Moriz's affairs, and not to worry over such a thing of secondary importance as an interrupted wedding.

Down below, in the kitchen department, matters had arrived at a very serious crisis. When the morning which had been fixed for the wedding arrived, much doubt and anxiety were expressed by several of the servants as to the likelihood of the ceremony being performed on that day. The whisper which had been first heard among the workmen while putting up the decorations had reached the kitchen, and produced a proportionate amount of disaffection among the inmates of the lower regions that soon made itself felt above stairs. The man who brought the ices from town about ten o'clock was full of the news in circulation, that the counselor's affairs were in an utterly ruined condition. Very soon what he said was confirmed by an exaggerated report which reached the villa an hour or two later, to the effect that not only had the late master lost everything, but that he was frightfully in debt into the bargain. A panic seized the servants, and while some began packing up their boxes, ready for departure as soon as they could extort their wages from the bewildered butler, others quietly walked into the dining-room and helped themselves to the delicacies and viands prepared for the invited guests. The confusion and discontent below was considerably increased when Flora's maid announced to the butler that her mistress's wedding was put off, and that she had orders to let him know

that the lawyers and town commissioners would arrive about midday, in order to arrange certain matters relative to the valuables in the house, and that he was to have the library prepared for their reception.

The first symptoms of disaffection down-stairs were exhibited by the careless indifference with which Mme. Urach's bell was attended to. She rang, and instead of her summons being answered at once she had to ring a second time; even then no one appeared in reply, and the angry old lady was compelled to leave her room and appear at the head of the stairs to find out the reason for such an unparalleled piece of neglect on the part of her usual attendants. Leaning over the balustrade, she saw a bevy of maids standing below talking and gesticulating in such eager earnestness that she imagined they had not heard her summons, till a few words of coarse reflection on the family in general gave the haughty old lady a glimpse into the insubordinate state of affairs, and caused her to retreat back to her own room with a flush of scorn and anger on her face.

But none of this confusion had reached the wing of the house where Henriette's private apartments were situated. The invalid girl was a favorite in the servants' hall, and now that they knew she was ill and suffering, not one of the whole staff would have ventured to speak above a whisper, or walk, except on tiptoe, on the staircase and landing leading to her door, for fear of disturbing her or of adding to her pain. Dr. Bruck had remarked to Nanni that her young mistress was dangerously ill, and Nanni in her turn had weepingly announced it to the servants below.

Henriette was lying on the sofa in her sitting-room, her golden head supported by pillows, and her beautiful blue eyes closed for the moment in exhaustion. She knew she must die, but she did not regret it; life for her had always been a burden.

The excitement of yesterday had been more than her frail body could bear, and toward morning she had had a violent fit of coughing, and then sunk into a deep swoon from which Dr. Bruck had great difficulty to rouse her. Her face was white as snow, and her small, emaciated hand was as white as her cheek.

As the young doctor gazed at her he knew that she would be spared the pain of leaving her much-loved home to live with Kathe at the Mill-house, according to Flora's suggestion—would be spared the still greater shame of hearing that her brother-in-law's name was branded with the mark of infamy—spared also the knowledge that he had sought his own death to hide the consequences of his sins. She had around her all she

could wish or desire; her last breath would be breathed in the presence of the doctor, for whom she ever expressed the greatest affection. He had promised her he would not leave her, would not go away and settle in Leipsic till at least she "was better," as she had remarked with an expressive smile, which told the young doctor she knew that she must die soon.

Presently she rallied, took a little beef-tea, and then, with a sweet, gentle smile, laid her hand in Kathe's, and said:

"I am as happy now as I used to be in the spring, when I was staying with Auntie Diakonus. You are here to nurse me, and you too"—she turned her eyes to Dr. Bruck—"Leo, you and Kathe I love best in all the world; remember *that* when I am gone."

Kathe had recovered rapidly from the effect of the blow on her head, and within an hour of her return to consciousness had been able to leave her bed and go about as usual. But for her looking a little pale, with the plaster on the side of her head and her hair hanging in two thick plaits down her back, no one would have guessed that she had had such a remarkably narrow escape of her life as to be first knocked down by a flying splinter of wood and then immersed in water from the overflowing river, where she would have been drowned as she lay if the keen eyes of love had not seen her fall.

She appeared as strong and able to walk about as usual, and evinced no signs of languor in her outward manner, though her heart was sinking within her at the sorrow before her. She knew quite well that Henriette was dying, and it was hard to part with her, although she tried to make herself believe that it was best as it was for one whose life could never be anything to its owner but one prolonged agony.

By the side of this grief was the bitter knowledge that her guardian's conduct had been cruel and reprehensible, even if no worse, toward those who had placed their faith in his integrity and upright dealing. She had heard the whisper in the hall as she passed through; and when she asked Dr. Bruck, with her eyes full of earnest anxiety raised to his face, if these things were true, he had not replied "No," but had turned away sorrowfully, and muttered, in a low voice: "I dare tell you nothing now." And afterward he had relapsed into his usual reserved, silent manner, from which Kathe made no attempt to rouse him.

A few hours succeeding to Dr. Bruck's interview with Flora, in her private apartment, he led his aunt into the anteroom outside Henriette's chamber, and closed the communicating door. When the old lady returned to the invalid's side, her

eyes were red with weeping, but her mouth and face generally shone with a bright, subdued happiness, and she softly informed the two girls that she intended going to stay at her nephew's apartment in town while the house by the river was being repaired. She did not reveal the subject of her private conversation in the anteroom, but as she stooped over Henriette and tenderly kissed her cheek, she whispered:

"When your sister Flora comes to see you presently, tell her that I ran away without saying good-bye to her because I think she would rather I did not disturb her."

And pressing Kathe affectionately in her arms, she quietly left the room, descended the side staircase, and left the villa.

An hour later Dr. Bruck received a message from town commanding his presence at the palace. The prince desired to consult him on some important matter connected with his son's state of health; and as Henriette was in a quiet doze, and her condition was not immediately alarming, he sprung on the horse the messenger had brought with him, and rode off to town.

A few moments after his departure Flora slowly ascended the stairs to pay a visit to her young sister. Without turning her eyes even toward the bed on which she imagined Kathe was still lying, she passed on to Henriette's sofa. She stayed a short while by the sick girl, asked her one or two questions which Henriette was too weak to answer, and then rose and left the room, preferring to pass through the maid's bed-chamber rather than risk an encounter with Kathe, who, from an arm-chair in the corner behind the curtains, had watched these strange maneuvers and wondered what they meant.

To her, Flora's strange behavior was an enigma, especially when, as Flora moved away from the sofa, and she spoke softly to her not to disturb Henriette, she stared blankly in front of her and pretended not to hear even the sound of Kathe's voice.

Once also in the course of the morning Mme. Urach found her way into Henriette's room, dressed in a black rustling silk, with a crape veil fastened on her head. She looked so woe-begone and miserable, with the tears pouring down her face, that Kathe feared the excitement would do Henriette harm, especially when the old lady began wringing her hands and lamenting the "fearful position" of the household in consequence of Moriz's death.

About ten o'clock on the morning of the third day after the explosion, Mme. Urach suddenly entered Flora's study with a newspaper in her hand and her face as pale as ashes. Her

grandchild was in the act of writing labels for several trunks packed and corded in one corner of the room; but when she saw the excited state of her grandmother, she rose and went over to her, and leading her to an easy-chair, on which the old lady sunk rather than sat down, said, anxiously:

"What is the matter?"

"My four thousand thalers are gone!" she moaned in answer. "Child! child! I have been deceived by a scoundrel, a villain, and my—my all—the savings that your grandfather managed to leave me—are all gone! My four thousand thalers, that I saved and guarded as carefully—"

"No, grandmamma, keep to the truth! say rather your four thousand thalers that you thoughtlessly and hopefully speculated with!" cried Flora, in a hard, unsympathizing tone. "Did I not warn you? Did I not tell you to be careful? And I was laughed at and called all sorts of ugly names because I would not withdraw my fortune from the funds—that were secure, at any rate—to double its value in your investment. Now, who was right, you or I? Has the firm which you joined become bankrupt?"

"Worse! It's a disgraceful affair! Just read for yourself. The man must have been a fiend. There is no hope for recovering a penny. I don't think I possess five pounds in the world!" the old lady moaned aloud, handing the paper to Flora, who scanned the passage rapidly and then laid the paper down on the table.

"What I can not understand is, that they refer there to a report circulated some days ago," the old lady continued; "and if that is true, the fact must have been known for some days—four or five, at least. Moriz knew nothing about it. It is very strange, and—"

"Don't you think it likely the account might have been in the papers you missed?"

"Ah! What? You fancy poor dear Moriz knew of this, and hid the papers on purpose, so that I might not hear of this terrible news till after the wedding? He thought it would upset me! And he knew of my loss, and—and it was he himself who talked me into it. Ah, yes! that is a good thought. I can swear that Moriz persuaded me to go into that undertaking; and, my dear, don't you agree with me that, as he misled me in the affair, I can claim compensation out of the estate?"

Flora clasped her hands in despair, wondering how she was to combat her grandmother's illusion without distressing her by telling her the truth concerning the real state of affairs. She had shrunk hitherto from the difficult task in the vague

hope that some one else would have incidentally made known to her the disgraceful position in which Moriz's death had placed them. But now there seemed no alternative but for her to inform the old lady herself of the hopeless condition of the counselor's affairs, and thus hinder her grandmother from complicating matters by making false claims on a fortune which did not exist.

"Grandmamma," she said, in a low voice, laying her hand on the old lady's arm, "grandmamma, the first question to consider is the value of the estate."

"How absurd you are, child! Just look out of the window and you will soon know, if you have your senses all right, that such a poor little sum as my four thousand thalers would never be missed from the proceeds of the estate if it were sold. Supposing, too, that Moriz's capital is irretrievably lost, as they say all the books and papers relative to it are destroyed, the land and house, to say nothing of the works of art contained in every room, will realize an immense sum, quite sufficient for us to live in luxury"—she sighed a deep breath of relief at the thought. "Why, my dear, the furniture of your room alone would fetch a price that would repay me for my loss—almost. How thankful I should be, Flora, if I were certain about my right to inherit this house, and—without going through the nuisance of a lawsuit."

"But supposing there is no necessity for you to enter upon a lawsuit."

Mme. Urach started.

"Are you mad, Flora? Weak and old as I am, I would run for hours, go without food and sleep for weeks rather than willingly admit any other claim to this house than my own—Nonsense, child! things have not taken such a terrible turn as that yet. You are cruel and wrong to suggest it even. Do you think that I—I will give up all this luxury and comfort and the courtly circle of friends I have gathered about me to a poor obscure person, whose whole life has been spent in poverty, and whose manners and surroundings would be as out of place here as a beggar's? No, my dear, I will not—I will fight for my right till I—"

"There is no need to get so excited over the matter, grandmamma. The old aunt living by the Rhine will have as small a claim to the property as you—"

"Who will? Are there other heirs?"

"Yes—creditors!"

Mme. Urach uttered a low cry of rage, and started from her chair.

"Be quiet, I beseech you, grandmamma; don't make a scene, please!" murmured Flora. "The people down-stairs know this better than I do, and are leaving the house as quickly as rats do a sinking ship. I dare not conceal from you any longer the terrible state of affairs, and now it only remains for us, as the speculator's dupes, to act in such a manner as not to make ourselves ridiculous. You must not look like that, grandmamma," and she arranged the old lady's untidy locks, and pinned the crape veil tastefully across her head, and fastened the lace round her throat more trimly with a cameo brooch she took from her own dressing-table; "keep up your own self-respect to the last. We must go away from here as soon and as quietly as we can—the whole affair is utterly disgraceful. No one doubts that the explosion was a willful act—in plain terms, the act of a villain, as Moriz will henceforth be called."

"The scoundrel!—the infamous knave!" screamed the old lady, springing up from her chair and tearing about as if she were going mad.

Pale as death, Flora quietly moved over to the open window and shut it close.

"Take care, grandmamma," she said, warningly; "you will be heard if you make such a noise as that. I have noticed people are hanging about outside; they have been there all the morning—were there at six o'clock. I am sure they are hanging about to see that none of our 'valuables' are removed—the cowards!" and her lips curled in scorn. "They are looking after their own interests. I was told by my maid, while drinking my coffee about an hour ago, that the tradesmen in town are furious—not a bill has been paid for six months, and you know, grandmamma, at what an expensive rate even we have been living. The butcher has gained an entrance to the hall, and declared that he means to see you as soon as you are dressed. He holds you responsible for a heavy bill as mistress of the house, and has already been very insolent about us all to the servants."

"Good God! what a position that wretch, whom I trusted implicitly, has placed us in by his cowardly acts!" cried the old lady, bursting into tears of rage and bitterness. "What are we to do? The position is truly tragic! What shall we do?" and she wrung her hands, the very picture of despair.

"The first thing to do is to pack up our own private property and every article that legally belongs to us, if we do not wish to have a seal placed on it by those remorseless vagabonds the bailiffs, who will be here some time to-day. When once

They gain possession we may know that our last chance is gone. I was just about to fetch my—" she checked herself with a grim smile—" my *trousseau*, and pack it in those boxes. Then I thought of taking an inventory of everything in the house, and if you won't hand over the property to the men yourself—"

"Indeed I won't—neither now nor—"

"Then the housekeeper will have to do it. We have every reason to say with truth that we are ill."

Taking from a drawer of her writing-table the key of the room where her *trousseau* was laid out, she moved away to the door, followed by her grandmother, who was bitterly muttering to herself angry invectives against the author of all her misery and distress. Flora led her to her own room, set her down in an easy-chair, and then went off as quickly as she could on her own errand of packing up her wedding finery.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE wind blew gently across the tops of the trees near the house, scattering the golden drops of the fountain in a showery spray over the side of the marble basin, and then wafted the sweet scent of the mignonette through the open window as far as the sofa-bed where Henriette was lying. The red-leaved creeper hanging round the window swayed to and fro in the air, as if it, too, would like to follow the perfume of the flowers, and find its way as far as the white muslin curtains surrounding the sick girl's couch.

Kathe sat by the bed watching her sister while she slept, and gazing tenderly at the wan appearance of her white face and the thin, attenuated look of the hand resting on the coverlid, not daring to rise from her seat and send away the birds, clamoring for their usual morning meal at the window-sill, for fear of disturbing the light sleeper. Every breath was so short and weak, it was painful to see it come and go; and Kathe knew, from the sad experience she had gained in nursing her sister the last few days, that sleep to her was life. The twittering of the hungry little creatures outside made the young girl nervous, for the stillness in the room had begun to feel oppressive, and no sound in the house could be heard through the carpeted floors of the corridor.

Nanni sat in the inner room, working as usual on some light material that made no rustling noise each time she moved. Every now and again she looked up from her work and gazed curiously for a moment at the "young lady from the mill" sitting in the arm-chair, who had lost half a million of money

in the explosion, and yet "looked just as sweet and simple as ever," dressed in a soft white morning-wrapper, with her fresh young face graver than usual, earnestly watching her sleeping charge.

"So young and full of life, and yet she does not care for gayety a bit," thought the waiting-woman to herself as her needle flew in and out in that noiseless way which made her presence in a sick-room an invaluable boon. "She is not a bit like Fraulein Flora, who thinks of no one but herself. One would think she didn't know the value of money, she takes her loss so quietly, whereas her elder sister is packing away as hard as she can to secure her own things safely. She has run that poor maid of hers off her legs finding her things this morning—not a handkerchief will she leave behind. She says she is going to Leipsic first to arrange matters for the wedding there, and that her good lover—God bless him for a nice gentleman, far too good for her!—is going to follow as soon as the poor little one is better. What a proud thing she is, to be sure—she seems to think no one good enough to wait on her, and she lets that dear, sweet—"

Her thoughts were interrupted by a loud knocking in one of the adjoining rooms which caused the invalid to half open her eyes and Kathe to rise quickly from her chair and beckon to Nanni to take her place and hold the little thin hand on the coverlid.

Quietly and quickly Kathe opened the door of Henriette's room, closed it behind her, and then without any ceremony opened the door of the adjoining apartment and entered.

Flora was kneeling down on the ground, in the act of folding her wedding-veil, when Kathe appeared before her. The long satin and lace dress which was to have adorned her beautiful person two days previously was hanging from its stand and partly covering her shoulder as she stooped over the trunk, and the maid was unfastening the orange-blossoms and laying them in a card-box at the side, in order to pack the dress without injury to its freshness.

"I am very sorry—I had no idea the knocking could be heard in Henriette's room, or I would not have done it," said Flora, in answer to Kathe's remark that the noise was disturbing their sister's sleep. "I am sure it did not once enter my head she could hear me. I have been nailing the labels on to those trunks." Her voice trembled slightly, though she spoke quickly. "You move about yourself so noiselessly that one might imagine it was the ghost of an ancestor doomed to roam over the scenes of her former existence," a wicked smile part

ed her lips as she added: "and mischief seems to follow your footsteps—wherever you go a mark of three crosses ought to be made, and—" She dismissed her maid with a haughty wave of her hand; then, as Kathe was silently following the woman's example, she flung the veil, with a jerk, into the trunk, and cried out:

"Stay here! If you have one particle of honor left in your woman's nature you will hear what I have to say."

Kathe gently put the hand aside which held her dress, and turned round.

"I will listen to anything you have to say," she replied, fixing her earnest eyes on the excited and passionate face of her interlocutor, "only don't speak so loud, please, or Henriette will hear you."

Flora did not answer; she seized Kathe's hand and drew her over to the window.

"Come here!" she said. "Let me look at you—I want to see how you look after being kissed."

The young girl started back and instinctively turned her head from the scrutinizing gaze of the impertinent face bent toward her, and a rush of color dyed her face crimson with shame at being so addressed.

"You have no right, elder sister as you are, to speak to me in any such tone."

"Ah, very well, little innocent; but I in my turn say to you, that, younger sister as you are, how dare you raise your eyes to the man to whom your elder sister is engaged?"

Kathe started again as if she had been struck by an unseen hand. Who could possibly have dived down into the very deepest recesses of her heart, and brought to light the secret she had striven with all the power of her young, passionate nature to hide even from her own sight? Painfully conscious that her face was becoming white as death, that she had no right to the secret thus unexpectedly divulged by the one who had just cause to condemn its very existence, she made no attempt to speak, and her pale lips did not move.

"Bad conscience! Your looks condemn you, little one. In there, you know that my accusation is true!" She lightly touched the girl's bosom with her finger, and laughed a low, mocking laugh. "You see, my dear, an elder sister can not be duped; she is able to read to the innermost record the hidden thoughts of an 'innocent' girl's heart like yours, and knows every sign of the would-be artlessness which tried to captivate the heart of the man you have dared to fall in love

with, from the graceful tribute of leaving flowers in his room, to—”

A tinge of color came back to the marble face, a power of movement to the rigid figure. Was it possible that such a simple act of forgetfulness—an act that she had often regretted since, not on account of the construction that might be put on it, but on account of the bitterness she felt when the young doctor silently removed them out of his room—could it be that such a simple act was to be a cause of reproach to her now? Anger and just indignation brought life to her cold, trembling limbs and gave her courage to speak.

“I acknowledge it was a piece of thoughtless forgetfulness on my part,” she said, drawing herself up with a gesture as haughty as an insulted queen. “Whoever thought it necessary to tell you of the circumstances has—”

“It was he—himself.”

“Then I am morally certain you have falsified what he said.”

“Take care! take care what you are saying; my patience is very nearly exhausted,” cried Flora, with a sneer, and tapping her foot on the floor in angry impatience. “You think I speak falsely? Does he when he boasts of his conquest over you?”

The color which dyed Kathe’s cheeks a moment ago vanished as quickly as it came; she shook her head, and after a short pause said, firmly:

“I won’t believe it, not if you assert it a thousand times over. I would rather doubt everything we are taught to honor and reverence in our intercourse with the world than that *he* is capable of such an untruth. No, no,” she went on, passionately. “He would not make such an unmanly boast, even he himself in the privacy of his own room. He is honorable, noble, grand—” she checked herself suddenly, and lowering her voice, added: “You were always suspicious of him, hatefully, wickedly so; I heard that with my own ears when I first came in the spring. I dared not enter your presence when he was with you, but now that I know him better, know how upright and true he is, it does not hurt me so much that you malign him, you and you only. How you can find it in your heart to do it is a mystery to me; your notions of honor must be very vague, Flora, or you could not and would not speak evil of a man to whom you are to be married so shortly.”

Flora started and looked up at her indignant young sister with doubt and curiosity strangely mingled in the expression on her face—she seemed scarcely to be able to believe her ears

"Either you are the most finished actress, or—a declaration of love must be printed in black letters on a white ground for you to understand it. Do you really know—nothing?" With an impertinent smile which showed all her teeth and made her face look almost diabolical, she took hold of Kathe's two arms, gazed searchingly into her eyes, and then pushed her angrily away, saying:

"Bah! what more can I want? Have you not excited yourself and defended him till you have scarcely a breath left?"

Kathe turned aside and walked toward the door.

"I don't see what you detained me for just now."

"Don't you? Am I so obscure then in my expressions? Must I speak more plainly? Well, then, my dear, I do not want to know anything more, nor anything less, than how Leo Bruck has behaved to you since yesterday morning?—what he has said to you?"

"How he has behaved to me? what he has said? That you can hear in a very few words. He tried hard to make me understand that my blind hope in Henriette's recovery was false—he tried very kindly to prepare me," her voice broke and the tears rolled down her cheeks, "for Henriette's death; she can not get better."

Flora drew back silently—remorse for a moment overcoming her; perhaps also the presentiment that she was playing a losing game with these two young people.

"Did you not know that long ago?" she said presently, in a low tone; "have you not often said that for her to go away forever would be a happy release from so much suffering?" Then walking gently up to Kathe again, she added: "And was that the entire subject of your conversation with him—word for word, all he said?"

A miserable suspicious feeling took possession of Kathe's mind that Flora sought an answer to this question, not so much from simple jealousy as from pure vanity; and she replied, rather stiffly: "Do you think that Doctor Bruck could possibly take an interest in anything else while watching by the bedside of a dying girl, especially when that girl is the truest and most faithful friend he has?"

"I know she loves him," replied Flora.

An indignant flush rose to Kathe's face, and Flora, noticing it, went on, with heartless want of tact:

"Yes, the man may congratulate himself that he can attract and win girls' hearts as easily as flame allures moths to singe their wings at its light. How the world will chuckle when the fact is made known that each of Banker Mangold's

daughters have been foolish enough to worship at the same shrine! Stay here! You shall not go yet!"

She had hitherto spoken in a half-bantering, half-sarcastic tone, but when the young girl moved toward the door she uttered the command for her to remain in a loud, threatening voice that rooted Kathe to the spot with astonishment and terror, for fear the wild cry had been heard in the sick-room.

"Yes, I mean what I say; even our youngest sister, the owner of the mill and Mill-house, stout of limb and courageous of heart, has been weak enough to lay her weapons of defense at this man's feet, and beg for a smile of approval. Oh, yes! you may look as indignant and haughty as you please, but you know it is true—true that you surrendered heart and soul without his—"

"Flora, how dare you speak so! You know that what you are saying is false—"

"False? Very well, I will believe you, and you can clear yourself of my accusation if you choose by withdrawing what you said just now, with such charming *empressement*, about his honor and faith."

"I will not withdraw one single expression."

"Ah, you won't? You are a wicked girl to fall in love with him. Look at me, Kathe! You dare not, you can not look me in the face and say you did *not*?"

Kathe raised her head, and gazed at her sister in speechless entreaty. She put her hand to the wound on her head, which was throbbing from the excitement of the conversation, but she took no heed to it; all her thoughts were concentrated on the subject of her sister's unkind remarks. Her heart beat fast, and her breath came and went quickly, as she said, as firmly as she could:

"You have no right, Flora, to ask me such a question, and I am not bound to answer you; but you have called me wicked, and spoken of treachery; they are words I have applied to myself, and—"

"A confession, in plain terms."

A faint smile flitted across the girl's pale lips and shone in her eyes, but her cheeks were as white as the linen band on her head, as she said, sadly:

"Yes, I do confess what I have no need to be ashamed of; but I will not confess to being guilty of the mean act you accuse me of, that of wishing to win to myself the affection of your lover. We can not help our feelings—no one can; we are answerable, however, for the use we make of them—the way we indulge them. Is it wicked to worship and reverence the

peace of a household? Is it wrong to admire the beauty of a grand tree growing in another man's garden? And I ask you, is it wrong to love without one shade of envy? I will have nothing to do with either of you. I will never cross yours or your lover's path again; you shall neither of you ever hear of me again; you shall not even be able to say that I ever reminded you of my existence. How could it hurt your wedded happiness if I love him to the end of my life—"

A bitter laugh interrupted her.

"Bravo, little one! We shall have you breaking forth into verse next."

"No, Flora, I leave that to you; all I say is, that I feel I have left far behind me the even and quiet paths of girlhood, and that since I have had this load to carry in my heart, my feelings and impressions are deeper, and perhaps more earnest."

She stepped back from the door where she had been standing, and went toward the inner part of the room. As she passed the rack where Flora's wedding-dress still hung she inadvertently touched it with her foot, and brought it to the ground with a rustling noise. Shocked and vexed with herself for her awkwardness, she stooped to pick it up and repair the mischief she had done by placing it back in its upright position; but Flora kicked it aside with her foot, and said, snappishly:

"Let the rubbish be! Even that lifeless thing resents your wickedness, and falls over directly you touch it."

"Do you think you are free from fault yourself, Flora?" asked Kathe, the angry blood mantling in her face, for her nature was passionate, and she felt she had been bitterly wounded and unjustly accused. That last taunt roused her anger, and she forgot prudence and discretion, and Henriette, and everything, and cried out: "What was it made me first begin to care for the man you say it is wicked to love? It was pity, warm, deep pity for one whom you did not understand, whom you slandered and wounded at every turn in private life, and snubbed and pained when others were near. If it was such a fearful crime for another to love him, why did you seek to free yourself from your engagement, why did you tell him that you would not marry him, that you hated him? I heard it, if you care to remember. I was by your side when you flung your ring into the water and cried out: 'Free, free!'"

"For Heaven's sake, Kathe, don't excite yourself in such a way!" Flora cried, pressing her hands over her ears.

A moment later she held the finger on which she wore the

betrothal-ring close to Kathe's eyes, and said, as her lips parted in a sardonic smile:

"There, there it is! I can swear that you will find no flaw in it; every letter is perfect in the engraving. However, to bring the matter to an end, I will tell you that this golden hoop has finished the part it has to play in my life. My engagement to Doctor Bruck is broken."

Kathe started.

"But once before you said your engagement was broken, and he would not consent to it," she stammered out, breathlessly.

"Yes, I know; but then the miserable traitor had a grain of honor left in him; now he has none."

"Flora, has—has he consented?"

"Yes, he has, and if you wish to hear—"

"Then he never loved you! and it was not love for you which made him refuse his consent in the spring; he must have had another motive. Thank God! Thank God, he can still be a happy man!"

"Do you think so? You forget I am here, my dear," said Flora, seizing the arm of her young sister while she glanced expressively in her face from under her knitted eyebrows. "I will never forgive him for making me beg for my liberty and refusing it; now he shall learn what it is to have the coveted cup lifted to his lips and then dashed to the ground just as he expects to drink the sweet draught. I will not give up my ring—no, not if I have to hold it fast with my teeth."

"The false one—the one you wear in place of the true one you threw into the water?"

"Can you prove that, my wise one? If so, where are your witnesses? It will be simply absurd to accuse me of such an act of insanity. However, make yourself happy. I am not so diabolically cruel as to hinder my late lover from the joys of married life. Oh, no, he can marry to-morrow if he will, only it must be with some one he does *not* love. He may marry for money, position—what he will: against that I have nothing to urge. I will have him watched night and day, and the moment I see him turning in the direction I do not choose, woe be to him, and woe be to *her* if he selects the one I do not intend he shall marry!"

Snatching up one of the orange-blossoms lying on the table, she twisted it in and out her fingers till it was a mass of torn and crumpled leaves, then she went on, slowly:

"Well, Kathe, you love him; have you no desire to beg for mercy for him? Think a moment. I have his happiness in

my power. I can give it or withdraw it as I please. This power is a priceless boon to me, and yet I am greatly tempted to freely give it up, in order to prove the strength and depth of so-called genuine love. And I will, too; I will hand this ring over to you, and with it transmit to you the right of giving it to whomsoever you please; but understand me thoroughly, in accepting this power you act in my stead, exactly as if it were I instead of you; and remember that I from this moment shall lay no claim to it myself. Will you, can you, accept the conditions in order to give to Doctor Bruck the freedom he wishes for?"

Involuntarily Kathe clasped her hands together on her bosom, and the muscles round her mouth worked painfully with the struggle going on within.

"I will accept the hardest conditions if thereby I can free Doctor Bruck from your clutches." The voice was clear, but very low.

"Don't make rash promises; you may be sacrificing your own happiness and peace of mind."

The young girl was silent; she raised her hand to the bandage on her head, and over her expressive face courage, strength, and faith in herself passed in rapid succession.

"I know what I am doing; there is no need to reflect about it," she said, simply.

Flora held a second spray of orange-blossom in her hand; she put it against her nose as if inhaling its perfume, while she gave her sister a searching side glance.

"But supposing, in order to humiliate me, he were to wish for you?"

Kathe caught her breath, but she replied, steadily:

"He will not do that; you told me yourself he did not like me."

"Right. But we will just for a moment suppose that he came to you and told you that he loved you; in such a case the pledge for his freedom would be in very bad hands, don't you think so? For you know that, once the ring is in your hands, you represent *me*, and you would have to say him nay; no, the temptation would be too much for you. I shall keep my ring myself."

"Good heavens! is it possible for one sister to enjoy tormenting another to this cruel extent?" Kathe cried out in the bitterness of her heart. "And yet, just because you are so selfish, because you have no mercy in your heart, and because you love to play fast and loose with this poor fellow, I will do all in my power to free him from you. You shall not *dare*

exercise your power over him. He shall begin a fresh life, shall enjoy home affections, and shall not be forced to walk by the side of one who cares for naught else in the world but society and herself."

"You are very flattering! You are far too much interested in him, show yourself too warm a partisan of his for me to confide my golden bauble to your care."

"Give it to me; I accept your conditions; you may trust me."

"And if he really and truly loves you?"

The girl's lips quivered painfully and she clasped her hands together, but she did not waver in her resolution.

"Even if it were so, I will keep my promise: he would easily find a girl to love far preferable to me: besides, he is not likely to make a mistake twice. Give me the ring; it is false, I know, and has not the least right to be a link between you—still I promise to do as you say, as surely as that other is under the water, for the sole reason of redeeming Leo Bruck's right to his freedom."

She stretched out her hand for the ring.

"As far as I have been able to judge your character, I give you credit for being far too honorable to make use of the tiny hoop for your own advantage," said Flora, impressively, putting the ring into her hand.

Kathe shivered as the gold touched her, and closing her fingers on the hardly won gift, a bitter smile hovered round her lips, as she thought that Flora had judged her rightly in saying that she was too honorable to make use of the prize for her own advantage. "And too proud also," she might have added.

"Well?" said Flora, noticing the smile, and not able to understand its meaning.

"You have my word," she said, raising her closed hand and shaking it in the air. "You ought to be content," she added, sadly, and opened the door to depart.

At that moment Dr. Bruck crossed the hall on his return from town. He glanced at the open door-way and saw the sisters, the elder with a look of conscious triumph shining on her face as she caught sight of him and coldly bent her head in greeting, while the younger one, with a hasty step and blushing face turned rapidly in the opposite direction, but not before he had had time to note the sad expression on her mouth and the frightened look in her eyes as hers met his. He hurried after her, and a moment later the door closed and

Flora's mocking, hollow laugh was deadened behind the curtains.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT same afternoon the bailiffs arrived from town to take possession of the house. They had been expected from early morning, preparations had even been made for their reception: but when at last they did arrive the whole household felt as if they received a shock. Late as it was, they yet came too soon.

Mme. Urach's old-fashioned furniture, which had been stowed away in the lumber-room when years ago she went to stay with the counselor, was being dusted in the upper hall preparatory to being packed; Flora's numerous trunks were still standing in the court-yard waiting for the carts; and various empty packages of large size, which the servants had not had time to fill with the few dozens of rare and costly wine specially regarded as Mme. Urach's property, were scattered about the hall in every direction.

When the sheriff sent a message to Mme. Urach, begging for an interview, she sternly declined to see him, on the plea that her nerves were already upset with grief and excitement, and that it was quite beyond her power to accede to his wish. And when later on the old lady was informed that in consequence of the furniture of her private apartment not being her own personal property, she must allow the bailiffs to take an inventory of the contents of the rooms and put their seal to the doors, she proudly retired to an empty little chamber on the same floor, and ordered her own old-fashioned sofa to be carried there for her use, rather than encounter a personal interview with the unwilling authors of her misery. The sheriff, who was a good-natured, pleasant man, felt great compassion for the proud, selfish old lady, and ordered his subordinates to place a few small luxuries from her elegant apartment at her disposal before closing the doors and applying the seal.

In the meantime Flora was hastily gathering together as many valuable objects from the drawing-room table as she could carry away. In vain the servants respectfully urged her to desist and leave things as they were. She would not listen to their remonstrance, and sternly bade them do her bidding.

They were hers and her grandmother's, given to them at various times by the counselor and other friends, and she would not leave them to be "confiscated" by those terrible Jews. But when the bailiffs arrived and the sheriff politely informed her that she must touch nothing in the rooms—that not an

article must be disturbed or carried out of the house until she had proved her claim to it as her own personal property—that he was sorry to undeceive her, but things must remain as they were, and he must attach his seal to each separate room, and that afterward whatever article she might apply for and prove as her own would be restored to her. For the present, however, nothing must be removed from its place. On this she became very angry, and insisted that she had a right to her own things when those “things” were her personal effects; but he was firm, and she had no alternative but to submit, which she did at last with a very bad grace.

The only part of the house left undisturbed by the bailiffs was the left wing inhabited by Kathe and Henriette.

Dr. Bruck sent for the sheriff, and in a few words informed him of Henriette's condition, and how impossible it would be for him to fulfill his duty and take an inventory of a room wherein a girl lay dying; “Besides,” he added, “I know for certain that the furniture about her is her own; it was a gift from her late brother-in-law, the counselor, on her birthday two years ago, and is as much her own property as the night-dress she has on at present.”

The sheriff bowed acquiescence, and gave orders to his subordinates for those rooms to be left in peace; after which the young doctor returned to the bedside of the dying girl. He had not been absent a quarter of an hour, but when he re-entered the room he saw that a change had come over her even in that short space of time. She was lying with her face turned to the open window, through which the setting sun was hiding behind glorious clouds of crimson and golden hues; swallows were flying around the window-sill, hastening home to their nests under the overhanging roof; and the song of the blackbird could be heard in the distance, mingling with the cooing of the doves in their cote.

The young doctor resumed his seat by the bed and gently laid his fingers on the dying girl's hand. He felt the fluttering pulse, and signed to Kathe to wipe her brow.

“Flora!” she whispered, raising her eyes to his face with a beseeching gaze.

“Would you like to see her?” he asked, rising to go and fetch her.

Henriette faintly shook her head.

“No—don't be vexed if I would rather be with you and Kathe alone until—” she did not finish her sentence, but began picking at the vine-leaves she had entreated to have laid on the sheet near her head. “I will spare her that—she will

thank me—and you know she hates emotional scenes;” a faint smile flickered for a second round her lips. “You will give my love to her, Leo.”

The young man silently bowed his head, while Kathe’s heart beat fast with a dread that she could scarcely define to herself. Henriette assumed still that the old relationship existed between the doctor and Flora—ought she to be told the truth? She glanced uneasily at the young man’s face, and noticed how grave and sad it looked; but he made no attempt to answer, and evidently did not intend disturbing his patient’s mind with news that there was no express need for her to hear.

Again she opened her eyes, and her gaze wandered to the window.

“How lovely the sky is. For the free soul to be there must be very heavenly,” she whispered. “I wonder if it will be possible to look down on earth when one is there. I should like to be sure that you are happy, Leo,” she murmured, turning her head with difficulty to look at him, and her large eyes were soft and tender in their expression—“quite happy when I am gone. You are so good—you deserve really to be happy.”

The stern grave expression of the doctor’s face vanished, and a smile beamed in his eyes as, stooping over the exhausted girl, he said, softly:

“My future is going to be very happy, Henriette. I think I may hope that I shall not always be alone; or rather, I know I shall not if God spares me, and—does my saying so give you pleasure, my dear little sister?”

He took the small thin hand in his, and bending his head low to her face, kissed her on the cheek. A faint color rose to her cheek as she looked across at Kathe with a contented smile shining brightly in her eyes; then, as if something in Kathe’s attitude of dejection pained her, the smile died away from her lips, and she said, between gasps for breath:

“Dear Leo, look at Kathe, and let me tell you now that your coldness to her has so often hurt me—hurts me here,” and she pointed to her heart. “You have been unkind to her sometimes, Leo; I have never been able to understand why. She has no one to love her. Be kind to her, Leo—stand by her.”

“I will, dear, till death!” he said low down in her ear, with more earnestness of tone than he intended.

“Good—that is right, Leo—now I am happy. Take care of her, and she will stand between you and trouble, as she has done for me.”

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"I will, like the true *sister* I will be to him from this day forth," broke in Kathe in a low, choked voice.

A sweet smile hovered round Henriette's mouth, and she closed her eyes too soon to see Kathe turn away her head, and with a gesture of her hand wave aside the doctor's outstretched fingers, as if the promise she had just given did not require ratifying with a clasp of the hand.

The smile broadened, and the dying girl laughed aloud; but the effort produced a rattle in her throat.

"Love to grandmamma," she muttered. "I want to sleep—to be at rest. Leo, let me sleep—sleep—"

"In a few minutes you shall sleep, dear," he answered, soothingly.

He put her hand on the sheet, and gently raising her head, slipped his arm round her neck and drew her close to his breast; and in a few moments she was asleep—the long, deep sleep from which there is no awakening in this life.

The doctor laid her down and reverently covered her face; then, going over to the window, he drove the little birds away from the sill where they were waiting for their evening meal, closed it and drew down the blind, and taking Kathe by the hand, slowly and silently led her out of the room.

A few hours later, when Mme. Urach opened the door to look at her dead granddaughter, she appeared at least ten years older than when she last entered that room. She had taken off the black crape veil she had worn for a day, and put on in its place the usual white tulle, for "no one," she remarked, "would wear mourning for such a 'villain' as the counselor had proved himself to be." She walked over to the bed, raised the handkerchief which covered the face of the dead girl, and her lips trembled as she said, in a broken voice: "She is at rest at last; it is best so; *she* is not forced to leave her cherished home and go among strangers. The bitter, hateful struggle with poverty is spared to—her."

Then Flora silently entered and walked over to the bedside, as if no one were in the room but herself. She stooped and kissed Henriette's cold forehead, lingering for a moment to look at her, but taking no notice of the silent pair of watchers on the other side—not even when the doctor spoke to her, and quietly delivered her dying sister's message, did she give the smallest sign that she had heard the words he uttered. Laying the handkerchief back on the face, she turned and crossed over to the door, where, in answer to the young doctor's repetition of the message, she slightly bowed her head, drew her rustling skirts together, and closed the door behind her.

Ten minutes later she stood in the hall, ready dressed, waiting for the fly which was to convey her and her grandmother to the hotel where rooms had been taken for them till they had decided where to permanently take up their abode; for the villa being in the hands of the bailiffs, to stay there another night was out of the question. Even the cold remains of the poor little invalid were to be removed to the house adjoining the church-yard as soon as darkness had completely fallen on the earth.

CHAPTER X.

ABOUT nine o'clock Kathe stood at the foot of the stone steps weeping bitterly. She had said farewell to the room where she and Henriette had passed many happy hours together, had kissed the cold forehead of the sister whose suffering was at an end now, and had silently bidden adieu to the only servant left behind to aid in guarding the house. At the bottom of the steps she stood still, and while involuntarily looking back at the dwelling where such a host of sad circumstances had taken place, she shivered and trembled as she thought of all that had happened there during the past few days. The soft night wind playing on her forehead did her good, and cooled the fevered flush of her cheeks and eyes. It was a lovely night, with stars shining brightly in the blue heavens—a night when all nature seemed wrapped in silence, when the wind was hushed and the rustling of the branches stilled, as if the awe-inspiring beauty of darkness had calmed the scene into quietude.

Slowly Kathe descended the steps and turned mechanically in the direction of the Mill-house.

She had reached the avenue, and was standing still for a moment to contemplate the view around her, when she was startled and frightened at the sound of footsteps. Her knees began to shake, but before she had time to move, the doctor's deep, sonorous voice broke the silence.

"I am leaving town in a day or two," he said, "and I think I am right in saying that you will not come and see my aunt, nor allow me to visit you at the Mill-house ere my departure? Hence, I suppose, this will be the last time we shall find ourselves together—at least for the present—"

"Never again," interrupted Kathe, firmly but sadly.

"Nay, Kathe, you are wrong there," he said, decidedly. "It would be a separation forever if I accepted our promise made to Henriette this afternoon; but I do not want you to be

my *sister*—such a relationship I will *not* have. Do you think a man would be content with kind, sisterly letters, when he is thirsting for a word of love from his beloved one's lips? But no, I must not say that to-day—I know I must be silent—though my heart is bursting to help you to bear the sorrow which has come to you this very day. I may not speak what is in my heart, but I will say one thing, Kathe: I could see by the expression of your face when I offered you my hand by Henriette's bedside that you had been told what had happened between Flora and me, and I know that you think I am to blame in the matter. I can bear that—but what I can not bear is that you should keep that promise of being as a sister to me. Kathe, I know that you have been influenced—that you dare not give me— I saw by your face,” he went on, after a slight pause, during which her heart throbbed so fast that she thought she should suffocate—“I knew by the way you turned your head aside that you could not trust yourself to keep that other promise you must have given—”

“Oh, don't! Spare me—let me go!” she murmured.

“Kathe,” he went on, “whatever that promise was, you must not keep it long. No, thank God, you shall not! for I know that when I come and ask you the truth that is in your heart, you will not hide it from me. Your true, sweet, womanly nature will assert itself. Kathe, shall I tell you that I saw you standing by the bridge that terrible afternoon—you could not see me but I saw you—saw you lean your head against the support at the side, and burst into a bitter fit of weeping.”

Kathe turned to go away; she could not bear him to speak thus, but he caught her hand and held it fast as he went on:

“I saw you, Kathe, and I can not describe to you how I longed to come over and take you in my arms and press you to my heart. For months I had fought against my feelings—for months I had crushed out of my heart, or rather struggled to do so, the love I felt had crept into it, and for months I had determined to be true and faithful even to the end to my unloved betrothed. But when I saw you standing there—I did not know you were back at the villa—I determined to give up struggling—I could not help loving you—I made up my mind that I could not marry my betrothed wife, with a raging passion of fierce, warm, devoted love in my heart for another. No—no! why need I be such a fool? I saw you looking at my house, but your eyes did not seek my aunt's room, Kathe; you—” he checked himself, but he covered her hand with hot, burning kisses, and his frame heaved with the strength of his

feelings, while she, poor girl, leaned against a tree totally unable to utter a sound.

"I will not reproach Flora—I will bear the odium and disgrace that I have brought on myself by breaking off our marriage at the very last moment. I know now, have known ever since the first week following upon our betrothal, that it was the beauteous form and faultless face I worshiped, not the woman herself, whom I had won for my bride. God help me, Kathe, if I have done wrong, but my whole soul and heart long for you. I told Flora that I loved you—"

"Ah!" It was but a weak cry, the cry of one in pain. He could not understand it, and would have drawn her into his arms, but she resisted him.

Flora knew this, and yet could deceive her to the extent of making her her dupe! She had bought his freedom from his "betrothed wife," but at what a price! The ring was in her pocket, and she knew that she *must* keep her word.

She raised her eyes to heaven and prayed that the bitter temptation might not be too much for her—that she might have strength given her to desist from drinking the contents of the cup of happiness now offered to her lips. But what if *his* happiness were to be the penalty of her faithfulness to Flora?

"You are very quiet, Kathe. Are you thinking that I ought to hold my tongue at least for to-day? You do not answer, you turn your head away. Kathe—Kathe! I will say no more. You know the desire of my heart, the wish of my life. But yours is an honorable nature, Kathe, and you will not satisfy me now, I know. Well! I will go, I will not urge you to decide; I will leave time to plead for me. I go away now uncertain and unhappy, but—I shall come back, Kathe—don't forget that I shall come back, and you will then tell me. Yes, you *shall* tell me what my own heart prompts me to believe is true—that you love me. Come, I will go with you as far as the Mill-house. Take my arm; a sister could not have more confidence in her brother than you may have in me. Come, and don't let me forget to tell you that my aunt and I will take care of you, if you will trust yourself to us on your journey homeward."

"I am not going back to Dresden," she said, simply, accepting his proffered arm and turning in the direction of the Mill-house. She scarcely recognized the sound of her own voice, it was so weak and tuneless, and her whole frame trembled so violently she thought at every step that she must fall.

But she went on, after a short pause:

"When I was in Dresden this last time I felt very miserable without anything to do but to attend to my music, and the few household duties which I insisted upon sharing with Madame Lucas. I felt then that I needed some earnest purpose for which to work, to which I could devote my energies and time. My life seemed to me so useless; I wanted to be up and doing. And only a few days before dear Henriette telegraphed for me to go to her, I had determined to speak to Moriz about it. I knew the subject would be distasteful to him, and that I should meet with no little opposition from one who considered that I had quite 'purpose' enough in life if I devoted my energies to making as much show as possible with my immense fortune. Now that is all over—the formidable iron safe has been blown into the air, though I have a very strong suspicion that the contents of the safe had disappeared some time ago. Nanni tells me that I have nothing left; is it so, doctor?"

"I am afraid there is not much left of—"

"But I have my mill and the house, and I mean to live there. Perhaps you will be shocked and think I am going in for strong-mindedness when I tell you that I have made up my mind to manage the mill myself. Are you shocked?"

"No; not so much as I should be if any other girl of your age had announced her intention of taking upon herself such a responsibility. I very much admire independence and energy in a woman, when properly directed; and I know you are not thinking of doing the work you propose for the sake of power, or of making yourself conspicuous among your neighbors. Still I do not think the position will suit you. You were meant to be the center of attraction in a home life, Kathe, and not to sit at a desk and keep accounts. Don't commence it—don't try it even; for if you do some one will be sure to come and run away with you just as you are putting the books in order, and not stop to inquire who is to supply your place at the desk."

Had a ray of light fallen across their path, dissipating the darkness of the avenue for only one moment, during which the doctor could have seen the expression on his companion's face, he would there and then have taken her to his heart, and not have let her go till she had promised to be his, and to marry him as soon as possible. But the avenue was dark, and he could not see her face to read there the effect of the silent struggle going on in the young girl's soul. He did not even hear her sigh; and he attributed her reticence and sadness, the low tone of her voice, and the want of elasticity in her step, to

grief at parting in death with the sister she had learned to love so well.

She did not answer the young doctor's last remark, and he reproached himself for trying to laugh her out of an idea that was evidently no light matter with her, under the sorrowful circumstances in which she was placed.

Presently they left the shadow of the overhanging avenue and reached the open meadow, where, on looking around, they could easily distinguish one object from another in light of the moon and stars.

"See, Kathe; look over there," whispered the young man, breaking the longest pause which had yet fallen between them, and pressing her hand against his side; "see, there are the two poplars in front of my little cottage. You gathered the first violets under their shade when you were a child, and I promised you in the spring you should always do so if you would. I mean to keep my word. I shall come and stay there during the Easter holidays."

Kathe's heart throbbed too loud for her to trust her voice to speak, for fear it might betray the state of her feelings.

How she longed to put her head against his shoulder and tell him—just once—that, whether he went or came, she must always love him! But she had bought his freedom with the price of her own happiness; hence she must silently endure the pain gnawing at her heart, and give no sign of how much she cared for him.

So she did not reply to his remark about the violets, but forced herself to ask:

"Will your aunt go with you to Leipsic?"

"Yes; she intends keeping house for me as long as I remain a bachelor."

Kathe started; but he could not see her pale face, and he fancied she had tripped against a stone. Holding her hand still firmer on his arm, he went on:

"She will be making a great sacrifice in coming to live with me, and I shall be truly thankful when she is able to return to the fresh air of the country. I hope that the loving, brave heart I mean, to win won't keep her too long in town," he said, in a low, earnest tone, scarcely above a whisper.

The light from the mill windows was streaming now across their path, and brought back to Kathe's recollection a conversation she had had with Susanne relative to Franz's widow and children, when that person had called at the villa to look after her young mistress in the morning.

The window of the room where the family sat of an evening

was dark, the door was closed, the yard deserted, and the only sign of life about the place was the subdued growling of the watch-dog, which sounded dismal and hollow as they drew near.

The young man clasped Kathe's hand in his, as he stood at the gate leading into the yard.

"I feel as if I were sending you into banishment," he said, softly. "Spare me the pain of knowing you are alone this evening with the weight of this sorrow upon you, and come with me. My aunt will love and cherish you as if you were her own child. Will you, Kathe?" There was deep passion in his voice, but his face she could not see.

"No, no!" she cried out, piteously. "Let me go. Do you think I shall pass the night in bitter useless weeping, that you ask me to go home with you to your aunt's? I have no time for that, even if I would. Let me go—go. I must see the widow to-night; she and her children have no one to comfort them but me. I had better go there at once," and she pointed to the darkened door.

"Kathe, dear beloved Kathe!" he said, pressing her hand in both his against his breast. "Must I let you go? It is very hard, but I must if you wish it. I dare not check you in your work of comforting the widow. So go, but take care of yourself. Keep the bandage on your head for a day or two longer. And now good-bye till Easter. When the winter snows are gone, when the earth wakes up from her cold lethargy and all nature rejoices in the coming warmth and summer, then, then I shall come back. Till then don't forget me, and think sometimes of me. How I shall long to see you, Kathe; and do not let slander or an evil tongue make you doubt me!"

"No, never!" The words were uttered with a sob, and she put both her hands into his. He heard the sob, and although he did not fully understand its meaning and chiefly attributed it to sorrow for Henriette's death, he suddenly let her hands fall, and clasping his arms around her trembling form, drew her close to his breast and kissed her lips and cheeks and eyes with passionate fervor, and the next moment he was gone, leaving her with beating heart, throbbing pulse, and tearless eyes to carry out her intention of visiting the widow and her children in their hour of bereavement.

Three days later, Dr. Bruck and his aunt left town to take up their residence in Leipsic. Kathe had not seen him again since the night he left her so abruptly at the Mill-house door, but "auntie" had called upon her once, and stayed with her a whole evening.

The day following Henriette's funeral, Mme. Urach and Flora also left town, the former to pass a month at one of the baths to recruit her "shattered nerves," the latter to "study medicine"—so it was reported among her acquaintances—in one of the large towns of Switzerland.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE than a year had elapsed since the cold March morning when Kathe Mangold, accompanied by Dr. Bruck, walked through the linden avenue on her way to her guardian's house, the sole heiress of her grandfather's immense fortune.

Whoever walked along that avenue now and cared to turn to his right as he passed onward toward the house, would see a row of pretty cottages in the distance, at the bend of the high-road from the town. These cottages were inhabited by the men at the spinning factory, with their wives and children. The ground on which they stood was the waste corner bit of land belonging to the mill garden, which Kathe had once earnestly entreated her guardian to allow her to place at the disposal of the men, who had clamored to have their dwellings built nearer the scene of their daily work at the spinning factory, when Mme. Urach and Flora had refused them the privilege of building on the outer side of the park.

The towns-folk were delighted at the erection of this row of houses. Formerly, at this special bend of the road stones and rubbish of various kinds had accumulated, making the thoroughfare look untidy, and spoiling the effect of the large, well-kept garden behind. But now the pathway was in excellent order, the cottages were clean and trim, flowers ornamented the windows, and the small gardens in front of each tenement were neatly railed round with green staves, against which various creeping plants were encouraged to grow. Hence the cottages were a great improvement to that special portion of the old estate, and were regarded with an immense amount of pride by their owners and their owners' benefactress, Kathe Mangold, the proprietor of the mill.

Kathe Mangold had carried out her wish, and installed herself mistress of the mill. She started her new plan by engaging a thorough man of business as head foreman of the works, and putting herself under his guidance to learn the details of the business. By dint of strong perseverance, constant attention to every detail, and determination to accomplish her self-imposed task, added to her quick perception and natural aptitude for orderly habits, she soon succeeded in mastering the

difficulties of her peculiar position, and gained sufficient insight into the workings of the concern to insure respect and confidence from those about her, and to increase the importance of the mill itself in the eyes of those merchants from whom the grain was purchased. Day after day she was to be found at her desk, overlooking accounts, dictating business letters, and superintending the general management of everything that belonged to the welfare of her subordinates and their work.

One of the first acts of her newly assumed authority was to install Franz's widow in a couple of rooms at the side of the mill, insure a small pension for her use during life, or until she married again, and to employ her as an assistant to Susanne in the cooking, besides giving her the management of such portion of the tiny dairy as was required for the daily consumption of the mistress's small household.

Shortly after the counselor's death, when her guardian's affairs had been examined into, and the full result of his speculations made known to his creditors, it was found out that Kathe's surmise as to the loss of her own fortune was perfectly correct. Not a penny remained to her of all the thousands left her by the miller, but the mill and house and ground on which they stood, and an odd hundred or two that had been placed to her credit in a Dresden bank some months previous to the catastrophe. She did not murmur, but accepted her fate, glad even that she had it in her power to work and to help others.

Thus the winter passed without any outward change coming to the young girl in the daily routine of her lonely, hard-working life. Now and again she would slip away from her desk and wander in the sunshine of a brighter day than usual across the park and down to the river-side. She would stand and watch the old-fashioned house with the golden weather-cock, look at its closed windows and cheerless aspect, and wonder if the time would ever come when she should be called upon to give up the ring in her possession to its future mistress, and see a bright, happy face flitting in and out through the open doors.

That Dr. Bruck had loved her she did not doubt for a second now, but she would not, dared not, think that he would come back to her, as his passionate words had implied the night on which he had parted from her.

She had often heard from his aunt during the six months which had elapsed since then; but not a line had reached her from the doctor himself. He had faithfully kept his word as

far, not to disturb her till the following Easter; and but for the increasing celebrity of his name, which caused him to be constantly mentioned in the weekly papers, and a remark from time to time about her nephew in his aunt's letters, Kathe would have heard nothing at all about him, and certainly not have known if he still had any regard for her.

While the days and weeks were growing into months, and Kathe bravely carried out the task she had set herself to do, she had no idea that her actions were keenly watched with warm interest by several people in town. But it was nevertheless true; and many who had regarded her coldly in the days when she was reputed an heiress, had lately tried to win the young mistress of the mill from her solitary life, and to induce her to join their home circles when her daily work was at an end.

Among the few who, to Kathe's extreme astonishment, formally called upon her to renew their old acquaintance, and to demand her friendship, if she would kindly extend it to them, was the grandmother of her half-sisters, Mme. Urach.

The old lady had returned to town toward the close of winter, and engaged a couple of rooms in a narrow street, where she lived secluded on her very narrow means, away from the world and society, and where her existence was scarcely remembered by half a dozen of the host of people whom she had so often entertained in princely style at the villa. She had not been in her new apartments many days before she heard of Kathe's doings at the mill, and of the success which was attending her efforts to make a comfortable income out of the proceeds of her well-ground sacks of flour. So she forthwith put on her bonnet, hired a fly, and drove out to the Mill-house to "do her duty to that young girl, her dear son-in-law's youngest child, and look after her a little."

Kathe received her kindly, placed her in the old-fashioned easy-chair by the stove, and ordered fragrant coffee and sweet cakes to be brought to her guest. When the old lady was rested and refreshed after her drive, she took her over the work-room, and showed her the different machines employed in the sifting and grinding of the grain. And finally when they returned to the house, Kathe slipped out of the room, packed a basket full of eggs and fresh butter, and a home-cured ham, and had it carried to the fly. When her guest was going, she begged the old lady so warmly to come and see her whenever she felt dull at home, that Mme. Urach's eyes filled with tears, for perhaps the first time in her life, and she could not find a word to say to express her thanks for this unex-

pected kindness on the part of the girl whose stay with her she had formerly made so miserable.

Easter arrived at last, and with it several workmen, to put in order the old-fashioned house by the river-side.

Kathe had not been out for several days, but on Easter-eve she walked as usual down by the river, while the workmen were getting their dinner. What was her surprise, on nearing the house, to observe that fresh, clean blinds were hanging at every window, that the garden had been "done up," and that the general appearance of the place betokened a return of its inmates, if not their return, at least the expectation of their arrival. While she wandered dreamily around the attractive spot, she met one of the late servants at the villa, who informed her that the old house had been partly refurnished for the reception of a lady guest who was to accompany Frau Diakonus from Leipsic, and that both ladies were expected to arrive by the afternoon train, and intended staying some time at the house. Then the maid rattled on about the beauty of this unknown guest, and how that special orders had come from the doctor to have everything in readiness by Good Friday, and that there was "such a fuss" being made over this young lady, who was to have the best room, etc., "and a new carpet to cover the floor."

Kathe turned away as quickly as she could; she did not care to listen to the gossip, for her heart ached and her temples throbbed, and she felt more inclined to burst into tears than to join in expressing pleasure at all this news.

"Who can she be?" thought Kathe to herself, as she slowly retraced her steps to the mill; "some one very dear to aunt and nephew; or the dear old lady, who dislikes visitors in her house, would not bring her down here with her on a lengthy visit!" and the girl sighed deeply.

When Kathe reached home her heart was very heavy; she would have given anything to be alone and quiet, but that was quite out of the question for several hours to come. Her work had to be done, several letters to be written, and an important matter of business to be discussed with her foreman, before she felt herself at liberty to indulge in the luxury of her own thoughts.

Then as the afternoon waned and she went into the dining-room to get a cup of tea to ease the pain and throb in her head which had prevented her doing any work, she met Mme. Urach's maid, with a letter for her to read and return.

Sending the maid into the kitchen to refresh herself with a cup of coffee after her walk, and ordering Susanne to fill the

returned empty basket with fresh cake and eggs, the young girl wearily sat down to peruse the letter. It was from Flora, and addressed to her grandmother.

Once or twice before Mme. Urach had sent Kathe a letter to read from her half-sister, and by this means she had learned that Flora had given up the study of medicine and was roaming about from one place to another in search of a society which would acknowledge her talents and appreciate her natural gifts.

But to-day Kathe was in no hurry to open the envelope lying on her lap; her thoughts were all in a whirl, and the paper seemed to burn her fingers. She rose, threw the letter on the table, and going over to the piano tried to play a soft, low melody. But it was of no use; she could do nothing to-day. She opened the window and let the cool wind pass over her hot forehead, then with trembling fingers and burning cheeks she snatched up the letter, opened the envelope, and began to read. It was dated from Berlin, and ran:

“I dare say you will laugh triumphantly, my dear grand-mamma, when I tell you that I have done what I think for the best, and engaged myself to Karl von Stetten, whom you once were so anxious for me to marry. He is uglier and more vulgar than ever, and ornaments his full-moon face with a pair of blue spectacles. *Fi donc!* I shall always be ashamed of walking by his side, but he has cared for me a long time, and by the death of his cousin has come into the family property, and is now the head of his house. So I don't think I have done so badly in—”

The letter fell from Kathe's hand.

“Leo Bruck is free—free—at last! He may come and see me now,” she cried, in a tone that was scarcely above a murmur, it was so low in its eager joyousness. “Can it be true that I dare think of him now?” she went on to herself. “These past seven long months have been terribly hard to bear. I thought I had crushed out of life every loving longing for him, and yet—yet—” She clasped her hands together and turned pale as the thought crossed her: “Supposing after all she is only duping us—that this is another of the cruel tormenting ways to—”

She picked up the letter and read the words again and again. Yes, it must be true; he has rank, wealth, all Flora cares about, she said to herself; and then she went on to read how the wedding-day was fixed for Whit-Monday, and that her *trousseau* was finished, and that she hoped “dear grandmam-

ma" would come and be present at the ceremony. Then Kathe's cheek paled and her knees trembled beneath her as she read further:

"I stayed a few days in Leipsic on my road here. Perhaps it will interest you to hear that the celebrated and far-famed Hofrath, Professor Bruck, has not only succeeded in making himself a favorite physician in the courtly circle, but has won the heart of a beautiful lady of rank. I am told that he is privately betrothed to the noble patient, who gave him her heart in return for his skillful performance of an operation which saved her life. Her parents are delighted at the match, and 'auntie' is charmed with her nephew's good fortune. I saw them altogether at the theater a few nights ago, and if I mistake not, auntie wore *thread* gloves! The girl is very beautiful—but hers is a wax-doll sort of beauty—and he? Well, I don't mind telling you, grandmamma, that I bit my lips with vexation to see him standing so calm and dignified behind his lady-love's chair, as if he had a right to all the good fortune which has fallen to his lot, and as if he had never, by so much as a hair's-breadth, swerved from the path of honor—he—the scoundrel! Give Kathe the inclosed—"

Ah! yes, she had not noticed the small folded bit of paper which had slipped out of the letter and lay on the rug at her feet. Picking it up she saw the words: "To Kathe Mangold."

For a moment her head swam, and her fingers trembled so violently she could not open the paper. Recovering herself with an effort, she read:

"Have the kindness to hand over to Countess Witte at once the ring I intrusted to your care, or you can fling it into the water with the other one if you like. FLORA."

CHAPTER XII.

KATHE suddenly became very still; she mechanically folded the inclosure and the letter together and replaced them in the envelope. Could the Countess Witte be the guest expected at the house by the river? She shook her head as the thought crossed her brain. Her eyes brightened and her cheeks flushed when his words came back to her memory.

"I shall return at Easter," he had said, and the young girl knew that he would keep his word, and that he would come. He would not break a promise given to the miller's grand-

daughter for the highest-born lady in the land. Besides, had he not said that he loved *her*—Kathe? She blushed as she recalled the loving, passionate manner in which he had clasped her to his heart. Doubt him? No, never—never.

She sprung from her seat and went over to the window, her eyes wandering with a happy, trusting expression to the spot where the old house stood. How her face flushed with excitement as she caught sight of the flag drooping over the roof by the side of the golden weather-cock!

The widow with her guest must have arrived! Should she run down to welcome her back, throw her arms round her neck and whisper her delight at having her very dearest friend near her again?

She must calm herself first—her glowing cheeks and beating heart would betray her to the keen, searching eyes of the dear old “auntie.” Yes, she would grow calm first.

For a moment she watched the dog in the yard barking at a beggar to whom Susanne had just thrown a handful of bread, and then she glanced round the large, comfortable apartment which she had converted into a sort of dining-room and library, the room in which she wrote her business letters, where she allowed no one to enter uninvited, and where she loved to sit and think or read when her work was done, and might enjoy a leisure hour if she felt so inclined.

She quietly went over to her desk, sat down, and taking up a pen began to write.

“Messrs. Schilling & Co., Hamburg.”

How her hand shook! No one would possibly be able to read such a trembling scrawl. She threw down her pen and leaned her hot, aching head on her hands.

Presently a cool puff of wind blew across her burning cheek. She looked up to see where it came from and saw—*him*, the one being in all the world whom she most longed to see.

“Leo! I knew you would come!” she cried, with a joyous ring in her voice that told the joy of her heart, and the next moment she was clasped in his arms.

“My darling!” was all he said at first. He kissed her again and again, on ears, and cheek, and hair till she turned her face from his breast and timidly raised her sweet lips to his, and in that first passionate, clinging kiss her fate was sealed forever.

“Well, I never!” cried Susanne at the door, astonished to find her young mistress half hidden in Dr. Bruck’s embrace; but a glance at his happy face reassured her, and she en-

deavored to close the door without being heard. But she was too late. Kathe had seen her, and withdrew from her lover's encircling arm, blushing painfully.

The doctor laughed, and holding her hand, said:

"No, no, Kathe, I won't let you go yet. I am afraid you will repent that rash movement of yours when I entered the room, and return to the old reserve. I have you now, and I mean to keep you. Come here, Susanne," he said to the old servant, whom he had seen enter; "come here and shake hands with me; your mistress has promised to be my wife."

"Good gracious, sir! Well now, really I *am* glad! and I knew nothing at all about it, but I am glad, and—and I hope you'll get married quick and be that happy—"

Wiping a tear from her eye with her apron, she bustled out of the room as fast as she could, to publish the good news to every one she met.

"Now, Kathe," said the young man, "Easter has arrived and your work here is over. How I have longed for this day, words fail me to express. Darling, my darling, I thought the time would never pass! It was so very hard to go without a single line or word from you. You wrote to my aunt, and those letters were my only comfort, though you rarely, if ever, mentioned my name; and then I knew that it would be best to allow a short while to elapse before I addressed you in any form, for your own sake. But tell me why you did not send me even one message? You promised to be my sister; surely—surely—"

He suddenly stopped, and his forehead grew a dark red and his brows contracted as his eyes fell on the well-known writing of the letter lying on the table.

Kathe drew her hand from his clasp and laid it over the paper. Why need he know now of the cruel torture she had suffered through Flora's heartlessness? There was no impediment in the way to her happiness now, why then tell him anything about the past? But he firmly lifted her hand from the table, and with a glance at her troubled face, said firmly:

"Kathe, I will not have any secret between us. Thank God, mystery and reserve shall be at an end where you and I are concerned. There is some secret in that paper; let me see it."

He read the letter, laid it on the table, and putting his arms round the girl, he pressed her close to his heart, and said:

"Now I understand the meaning of your words that day—now I know how you sacrificed yourself for me. Darling, can I ever repay you the pain and misery I so unconsciously made

you suffer? Kathe, you love me? I have seen it in your eyes—heard it in your voice, but tell me you love me with your lips. Do you, Kathe?”

She nestled closer to him and said, softly:

“I think I love you too much, Leo.” Then, half laughing and half inclined to cry, she added: “But what about the beautiful-Countess Witte? Is she not going to stay with auntie and occupy the newly furnished room?”

“No,” he answered, laughing; “I did not wish you to know from the people about that I was coming, but that room is for me—just for the present. As to the pretty little countess, she is so grateful for my having successfully operated on a troublesome tumor on her head, that she is a shade too demonstrative in her delight, and speaks of me in terms that perhaps have led people to imagine she and I care for each other. She is a dear little woman, and is devoted to a young sailor who is coming home this summer. You will soon learn to know her, for I mean to take my wife back with me after the holidays.”

“Leo!”

“Well, my love? Our engagement has lasted seven long months—surely that has given you time to consider, and if not—humph!—you must think about it afterward,” he added, laughing and encircling her face with his two hands. “Come here and tell me if you would like to stand by my side at the altar, there.” He pointed to a church spire rising beyond the trees. “I love that little village, and the minister is a great friend of mine.”

“Do with me as you will, Leo,” she replied, softly, with such loving tenderness in her tone. “But my duties here—”

“You shall not cast up another line; your foreman, or rather the manager, must look after your interests for you till—”

“Just as you like. When I return I will formally intrust him with the management of the mill; he is a true, honest man.”

“Have you heard that Moriz has been seen in America?” asked Dr. Bruck, later on in the evening, when he and Kathe were walking under the trees on the avenue, and the lights from the windows of the villa told them that the new family living there were at home.

“Yes, besides I have known all along that he was alive.” And she related how she had seen the workman in his blouse driving the deer across the meadows to the high-road about a quarter of an hour before she was struck down when the ex-

plosion took place, and added: "A few days ago Franz's widow received an anonymous letter inclosing fifty pounds from California. She wonders who her unknown benefactor is, but I knew immediately from whom the money came."

A few steps further brought the young couple in front of the old house by the river-side, and a minute later the noble old lady, Frau Diakonus, had clasped her loving arms around her "dearest little daughter," and whispered:

"I would rather you married my Leo than any other girl in the world. How he loves you, Kathe."

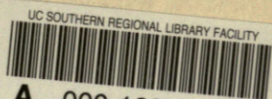
"And how I love *him*!" replied Kathe, softly, and kissed her old friend's cheek.

Before closing the hall door and going in for the evening meal, Dr. Bruck called Kathe to his side. Putting his arm round her, he said, earnestly:

"Listen, Kathe, to the bells! They are ringing in Easter Sunday—and you and I are together—at last."

THE END.

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